Their Eyes Were Watching God

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama into a large family, the fifth of eight children. Three years after Hurston's birth, her family moved to Eatonville, Florida, one of the first all-black towns in the United States. Eatonville is of clear importance to Hurston, as it becomes a predominant setting in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and is often cited by Hurston as her birth-place. Hurston began Howard University in the South in 1918, but left in 1924 and then was offered a scholarship to Barnard College (part of Columbia University) in New York one year later in 1925. She earned a Bachelor's degree in anthropology in 1927, and at that point was 36 years old. She continued graduate studies at Columbia in anthropology but did not complete her degree, and instead spent many years doing fieldwork in the Caribbean in the late 1920s and 1930s, while also working on her fiction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, many all-black towns began to emerge in the South in the United States, and were soon incorporated into the nation officially. Eatonville, Florida is one such town, incorporated into the U.S. on August 15, 1887, and is known in particular as being the hometown of Zora Neale Hurston.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Given Hurston's political deviation from the Harlem Renaissance, her works such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) – along with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* – are not seen as related to the movement. Instead, because of her identity as a socially liberal Republican, displaying feminist leanings more than anything else, Hurston is often associated with the female, Libertarian writers Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel Paterson.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- **When Written:** 1936-1937
- **Where Written:** Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* while doing fieldwork in Haiti in 1936-1937.
- **When Published:** 1937
- **Literary Period:** Hurston's work coincided historically with the Harlem Renaissance, though she is actually known for diverging with the politics and ideologies of many writers of the movement, including Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. In particular, Huston identified as a Republican and actively spoke against many Harlem Renaissance writers' support of the New Deal and Communism.
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** The American South in the early 20th century. The novel takes place most centrally in Eatonville, Florida and in the Everglades.
- **Climax:** The climax of the novel arguably unfolds in Chapter 18, during the hurricane. It is in this scene that Janie and Tea Cake are situated in clear opposition to the forces of nature, and find themselves fighting against the will of God for survival.
- **Antagonist:** Janie's first two husbands, Logan Killicks and Jody Starks, are disrespectful and abusive partners, effectively situating them as Janie's antagonists for the first half of the book. In the second half, Mrs. Turner functions as an antagonist to both Tea Cake and Janie, expressing her racist views against black people to both of them and alienating Tea Cake in particular by suggesting that Janie leave him for her lighter skinned brother.
- **Point of View:** The novel is Janie's life-story, told to Pheoby Watson by Janie herself. However, throughout the novel, a third-person omniscient narrator interrupts Janie's narrations and direct presentations of characters' speech. The narrator's mode of speaking is distinctly literary in contrast to the Southern dialect of the other characters, but is nonetheless influenced by the language and imagery of the characters and their world.

EXTRA CREDIT

Political leanings. Hurston famously spoke against the Supreme Court's ruling the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case (1954), arguing simply that segregation in schools did not preclude black children from getting an equal education. This kind of attitude speaks to Hurston's right-leaning politics.

PLOT SUMMARY

Their Eyes Were Watching God focuses on the experiences of Janie Crawford, a beautiful and determined fair-skinned black woman living in the American South. The novel begins when Janie returns to Eatonville, Florida after having left for a significant amount of time. She is met by the judgmental gossiping of Eatonville's townspeople, whose conversations focus on the fact that Janie had left town with a young man named Tea Cake. Amidst their gossiping, Janie's friend Pheoby Watson stands up for Janie and goes to greet her friend. Janie tells Pheoby her life story, including what happened in the time

since she initially left Eatonville, which is the story of the rest of the novel.

Janie spends her childhood being brought up by her grandmother Nanny, a former slave who, despite her controlling nature, has only the best intentions for her granddaughter. Before buying a new home for herself and her granddaughter, Nanny raises Janie in the backyard home of Mr. and Mrs. Washburn, a friendly white couple whom Nanny began working for after she was granted freedom. Nanny wishes for Janie to find improved social standing and financial security in life, and so when she sees Janie kissing a boy she quickly arranges for Janie to marry the wealthy farmer Logan Killicks.

Janie is not content with her marriage to Logan Killicks, but hopefully wishes that she will grow to love Logan. Unfortunately, her hopes are instead met by abuse by Logan, whom she feels treats her as an animal. Thankfully, one day Janie meets the handsome and ambitious Jody Starks, who courts her and eventually encourages her to run away from Logan. Janie complies, they marry, and head off together to Eatonville, Florida.

In Eatonville, Jody seeks political power and entrepreneurial control over the town, becoming both the mayor and the owner of the main store in town. Janie feels love for Jody at the very early stages of their relationship, but ultimately comes to feel stifled by his desire for control and power – especially because he regards Janie as nothing more than an accessory to all of his success.

Jody eventually becomes ill and his treatment of Janie worsens along with his deteriorating health. Finally, Janie speaks up for herself and Jody violently beats her in front of everyone in the store. While Jody is on his deathbed, Janie ceases to be silent, and tells Jody all about how terrible he made and makes her feel. Soon after these conversations, Jody dies.

Following Jody's funeral, Janie does not feel as though she is in a state of mourning, but instead feels free and excited about her life and fulfilling her dreams for the first time in decades. She begins to wear her hair down – not in the mandatory head rag Jody made her wear – and white clothing, to alert potential suitors to her new availability. One day while Janie is working in Jody's former store, a handsome young man named Tea Cake walks in, flirts with Janie and invites her to play checkers with him. Despite Janie's initial ambivalence, she is charmed and spends the rest of the evening with Tea Cake. Because of Tea Cake's younger age and lower social status, the townspeople worry about Janie going out with him, but Janie disregards their judgment and listens to her feelings instead. She and Tea Cake eventually run off together to the Everglades and get married.

Janie and Tea Cake's married life together in the Everglades (or "the muck") is not perfect: he steals money from her, whips her once to assert power over her, and wrestles playfully with another girl in town named Nunkie. A woman in town named Mrs. Turner causes tension in their marriage, too, as she repeatedly tells Janie to leave Tea Cake for her lighter-skinned brother, demonstrating tremendously racist views. That said, Janie feels better with Tea Cake than she had felt with either of her other husbands: Tea Cake treats her as an equal and their marriage is built on authentic love and mutual respect. In the muck, they have many friends and host frequent informal parties at their home.

Their happy life in the muck comes to an end one day a massive hurricane hits the area. During the storm, a rabid dog attacks Tea Cake and infects him with the disease. At first, Tea Cake is unaware of his condition, but quickly worsens and begins to go mad. Janie calls for a doctor who tells her of his disease, but assures the worried Janie that he will send for medicine. Janie realizes, however, that in his ill and manic state, Tea Cake has convinced himself of Janie's infidelity, and has been hiding a loaded pistol beneath his pillow. Janie is forced to kill Tea Cake in order to save her own life. She is brought to court, but found innocent by an all white, male jury after delivering a heartfelt testimony about her true love for Tea Cake.

At the end of the novel, Janie returns to Eatonville – this return is the point at which the novel starts – and concludes her story to Pheoby. Despite her sadness about Tea Cake's death, Janie tells her friend that she is happy to be back, now feeling that she has reached the horizon and has access to her dreams. Tea Cake, Janie feels, is still a presence in her life, as their love provided her with the fulfillment of her desire for a voice and a sense of independence, things she had never known before him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Janie Crawford – The novel's heroine, Janie is both the narrator and protagonist of her story. Of mixed-race origins, Janie is the object of much attention for her notably light black skin and physical beauty. But behind Janie's beauty is where her true character lies: she is headstrong, determined to achieve fulfillment on her quest for independence, spiritual nourishment, and self-expression.

Tea Cake –Of her three husbands (Logan Killicks and Jody Starks being the first two), Tea Cake is Janie's one and only true love throughout the novel. Twelve years younger than Janie and of much lower social status, Tea Cake appears initially as a risky candidate for marriage. However, he treats Janie with far more respect and affection than either of her other husbands, though all is not perfect in their marriage as Tea Cake at times lies and once beats Janie. Upon their meeting, Tea Cake engages Janie in lively conversation and asks her to play

checkers, treating her as an equal player. Tea Cake satisfies Janie's desire for sexual fulfillment and self-expression, allowing her to arrive at the horizon at the novel's end.

Jody Starks – Jody Starks is Janie's handsome, wealthy, ambitious, and power-hungry second-husband. Meeting Jody Starks prompts Janie to leave her first husband, Logan Killicks, who she felt treated her as nothing more than an animal. Upon meeting Jody, Janie feels that she catches a glimpse of the horizon. Although Jody initially flatters Janie by focusing on and complimenting her beauty, he too ends up demoralizing her, treating her as an object upon which to exercise his desire for control and power rather than as a partner of equal standing in the relationship.

Logan Killicks – A wealthy farmer and land-owner, Logan Killick's is Janie's first husband. Their marriage is arranged by Janie's grandmother Nanny, a former slave who desires financial security and social status for Janie, and thinks that goal is more important than paying any attention to her granddaughter's own individual desires. Logan forcefully demands that Janie work behind the plow alongside him on the field, making her feel dehumanized and disrespected. Janie ends up leaving Logan for Jody Starks.

Nanny Crawford – A former slave, Nanny is Janie's grandmother, a woman predominantly characterized by traditional perceptions about gender and marriage. Specifically, Nanny focuses on the importance of upward mobility and financial security for women, especially black women, and sees that goal as attainable only through marriage and the primary factor in selecting a husband (as opposed to, say, love). Although Nanny only wishes the best for her granddaughter, Janie feels tremendous frustration at various points throughout the novel for the limitations that Nanny's traditional worldviews have imposed upon her life and her particular desire to seek independence and freedom.

Leafy Crawford – Leafy Crawford is Janie's mother, whom Janie never knew. She is the daughter of Nanny and Nanny's slave-master, who raped Nanny just before the end of the Civil War. Leafy is herself raped by her teacher, getting her pregnant, and she begins to drink every night preceding Janie's birth, and ultimately runs away after giving birth to her, leaving Nanny to take care of her granddaughter.

Pheoby Watson – Pheoby Watson is Janie's closest friend in Eatonville, and repeatedly defends Janie against the mean-spirited gossip of the townspeople. Pheoby is the character who listens to Janie tell her story – the body of the novel – and in this way, is the character in the novel who most actively recognizes Janie's newfound capacity for self-expression.

Sam Watson – Sam Watson is Pheoby's husband and a frequent participant in the conversations that unfold on the porch of Jody's store in Eatonville. Sam Watson voices particular concern on Janie's behalf as she begins to see Tea Cake publicly, worrying that Janie will end up like the poor widow Mrs. Tyler, who was cheated out of her money by her younger lover called Who Flung.

Captain Eaton – A principal donor of Eatonville's initially existing fifty-acres, Captain Eaton is perhaps the first ambitious entrepreneur to set foot in Eatonville. However, when Jody and Janie arrive to Eatonville, Jody purchases more land from Captain Eaton and proves himself more desirous of public control, usurping the Captain's former role of authority over the town.

Hezekiah Potts – Hezekiah Pott's is a loyal employee at Jody's store, and voices his judgments of Tea Cake to Janie as she begins to see him around the store following Jody's death. Hezekiah also attempts to act with Jody's sense of authority and control over the store after his death, which Janie simply finds amusing, not threatening.

Mr. and Mrs. Robbins – Mr. and Mrs. Robbins are townspeople in Eatonville and patrons of Jody's store. When Mrs. Robbins comes to the store one day to beg for a bit of meat and the on-looking men on the porch make fun of her, Janie stands up for Mrs. Robbins and tells the men they don't know anything about women.

Annie Tyler and Who Flung – Annie Tyler is the infamous widow of Eatonville, who was cheated and left by her younger lover Who Flung. Townspeople of Eatonville warn Janie of this tale as she begins to date Tea Cake, and she too finds herself worrying about whether or not she will end up like Mrs. Tyler at the beginning of her marriage to Tea Cake.

Mrs. Turner – Mrs. Turner is Janie and Tea Cake's awkward looking and often disrespectful neighbor in the muck, who attempts to befriend Janie and alienates Tea Cake. Mrs. Turner repeatedly suggests that Janie go out with her brother, who she says is much better than Tea Cake because of his intelligence and lighter skin. Despite her own identity as a black woman, Mrs. Turner exhibits extremely racist attitudes against people of her own race, highlighting the often paradoxical and inexplicable nature of racism.

Dr. Simmons – Dr. Simmons is the white doctor in the muck who tells Janie of Tea Cake's contraction of rabies after the dog bites him during the hurricane. After Tea Cake's death, Dr. Simmons gives a testimony in defense of Janie after she is called to court, telling the jury that Tea Cake was dangerous and Janie was right to kill him in self-defense.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Johnny Taylor – Johnny Taylor is the first person to kiss and be kissed by Janie at the age of sixteen, following her moment of sexual awakening under the pear tree. Having inadvertently witnessed her granddaughter's first kiss, Nanny immediately arranges for Janie to marry the older and wealthy farmer Logan Killicks.

Mr. and Mrs. Washburn – After Nanny is freed from slavery, she moves in with the white couple Mr. and Mrs. Washburn and works for them as an employee. Janie spends many of her childhood years living with Nanny in a small house in the Washburns' backyard, growing up alongside their children.

Lee Coker and Amos Hicks – Coker and Hicks are the pair of townspeople Jody and Janie encounter immediately upon arriving in Eatonville. Both men attempt unsuccessfully to seduce Janie, foreshadowing Jody's controlling behavior over his wife's self-expression due to feeling threatened by how many men desire Janie in the town.

Tony Taylor – Tony Taylor is the town assembly leader in Eatonville, until Jody comes along and usurps his power. After Jody takes over the town meeting, he enlists Tony Taylor as one of the two carpenters (along with Lee Coker) of the store he plans to build and run in Eatonville.

Matt Bonner – Matt Bonner is the owner of the sad looking mule that is initially the brunt of the townspeople's jokes. However, after Janie sympathizes with the victimized mule, Jody purchases it and Matt Bonner's mule becomes Eatonville's effective mascot.

Mr. Turner – Mr. Turner is Mrs. Turner's sad looking husband, described as having a "lungless laugh." Mr. Turner appears stripped of all his power and energy by his controlling and demanding wife.

Nunkie – Nunkie is the young, chunky girl who works alongside Janie and Tea Cake on the fields in the muck. One day, Janie finds Tea Cake and Nunkie playfully wrestling on the ground, and Janie aggressively separates them and berates Tea Cake for his apparent infidelity.

Dick Sterrett, Coodemay, Stew Beef, Sop-de-Bottom, Bootyny – Laborers who live and work in the muck. Sop-de-Bottom in particular voices good-natured jealousy of Tea Cake's power over Janie. All of these men are present at the fight at Mrs. Turner's restaurant, Dick Sterret and Coodemay being the most raucous members of the bunch.

Motor Boat – Motor Boat is a friend of Tea Cake and Janie's and fellow laborer in the muck. He remains with Tea Cake and Janie at their home during the hurricane, and the three of them eventually attempt to escape the rising waters of the hurricane together.

Pearl Stone – A woman from the town who seems to resent Janie.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONS

Their Eyes Were Watching God explores traditional gender roles as one of its main themes – specifically the way that stereotypical ideas about relationships between men and women empower men and disempower women. The novel's plot is driven by Janie's series of relationships with different men: a kiss with Johnny Taylor, followed by marriages with Logan Killicks, Jody Starks and finally, Tea Cake. Logan Killicks and Jody Starks see Janie as defined by her relationship with them, and expect her to be obedient, silent and proper. Jody sees her as a kind of ornament that bolsters his social standing and that helps to justify his efforts to assert control over everyone, men and women alike.

Tea Cake, in contrast, defines himself not by political power but rather by his physical strength and ability to have fun. Even while Tea Cake treats Janie as an equal, there still exists a certain power struggle in Janie's relationship with him, as her increasing ability to recognize her needs as an individual throughout the novel emerges in response to Tea Cake's treatment of her. Thus it is still possible to see Tea Cake as having a degree of control over Janie until the moment of his death. In each of her relationships, we watch Janie lose parts of herself under the forces of male domination.

The men are not the only characters who see the traditional take on gender relations (strong men, obedient women) as necessary and worthwhile. Nanny, as a former slave who endured brutal conditions in her life, is understandably more concerned with material well-being than self-expression. She therefore sees marriage as a means to gain status and financial security for her granddaughter, and does not believe that a black women *can* gain independence without a man. But Janie has different concerns, separating her from Nanny and other women who accept the traditional gender roles on display in the novel. Janie seeks self-expression, and authentic love based on mutual respect—a goal she ultimately achieves in her relationship with Tea Cake and, even more so, after his death, when she has fully come to know herself and can speak her mind and tell her own story.

VOICE, LANGUAGE AND STORYTELLING

Janie is both the protagonist and narrator of her story, recounting her life experiences to her friend Pheoby after arriving back to Eatonville at the end point of her journey. Janie's experiences within her marriages, a central subject of her story, are what drive her to recognize that what she most actively seeks is a voice for herself—to be someone who can speak and be listened to. The distinctive personalities of Jody and Tea Cake in particular bring to light Janie's progress toward finding a voice. While Jody stifles Janie

and does not allow her to express herself, Tea Cake earns Janie's attraction precisely by acting as her equal, by being someone who listens.

Janie's full discovery of her own voice emerges in Chapter 19, the climactic trial scene immediately following Tea Cake's death. In this scene, Janie-the-narrator noticeably decreases her interruptions of the narrative itself, instead allowing herself as a character to provide continuous testimony. This shift marks her recognition of herself as an individual with a unique voice, one that she owns and can control without supervision from a man. Janie's story can be read not only as recounting her experiences to a friend, but also as a triumph in and of itself. That is, her goal and desire throughout the novel is to find a voice that is her own and to use that voice to express herself as a person. So being able to tell her own story, to be both the narrator and protagonist, marks the achievement of that ambition.

Their Eyes Were Watching God not only explores the theme of language and storytelling at the level of narrative content, but also through its form. There is a clear split between the narrator's literary style and the dialect of the black American South used by Janie and the characters in her community. This split is deliberately challenging to read, indicating Hurston's attempt as the author to equalize these different forms of communication. By writing the novel in this way, Hurston endows the black community she seeks to portray in the novel with a literary "voice" that was previously unrecognized or seen as un-literary and not worth listening to.

DESIRE, LOVE, AND INDEPENDENCE

Their Eyes Were Watching God focuses its plot both on Janie's series of romantic relationships as well as on Janie's individual quest for self-fulfillment and spiritual nourishment. In the novel, Janie's marriages are what most concretely impede upon her individual quest, but in doing so they actually force Janie to become aware of what it is that she wants for herself as an individual. In the cases of Jody and Tea Cake, Janie interprets her initial sexual appetite for these men as a sign of love, and as a result, a reason for marriage. Given that Jody entirely strips Janie of independence, his death allows her to move toward a recognition of herself as a self-possessed individual. Janie's attraction to Tea Cake initially emerges from her feeling that he gives her exactly what Jody did not: a sense of equality. However, her eventual marriage to Tea Cake still has its problems and impinges on her personal independence.

For instance, Tea Cake steals Janie's money and spends it on food and alcohol for his friends; he causes Janie to feel intense jealousy by sneaking off with Nunkie and then proceeds to comfort Janie through sex, rather than by listening and validating her emotions directly. After Tea Cake's death, though, Janie realizes that despite difficulty, there were real elements of their marriage that gave her a sense of individual fulfillment and equality with him. As a result, even when Tea Cake is no longer alive, Janie is able to express her continued feeling of individual fulfillment, as she remains nourished by the spirit of Tea Cake, who she still loves, but is able to live on her own. At the end of the novel, Janie realizes the possibility of coexistence between love and a sense of self-fulfillment and independence.

POWER, JUDGMENT, AND JEALOUSY

Different characters in the novel struggle to find a way to cope and thrive as individuals within communities and within the natural world. Janie searches for individual fulfillment by attempting to find her own voice and independence; Jody seeks total control (through acting as Eatonville's mayor or by forcing Janie to wear her hair in a headscarf out of irrational jealousy); Tea Cake desires a fun-loving approach to life, bordering on the pathological (stealing Janie's money without thinking anything of it, for example, or facing down the hurricane, ultimately paving the way toward his death).

Of course, the novel most extensively explores Janie and her life-long attempt to tune out judgment from the world around her and find power in her own voice. Janie's search for independence reveals her desire to detach from the pressures of judgment and jealousy from her husbands and townspeople and to think for herself. The lessened pressure of a power struggle having to do with judgment and jealousy in Janie's marriage with Tea Cake is what ultimately permits Janie to find fulfillment at the end of the novel. In this way, the end of the novel tells us that Janie's search for independence emerged, at least in part, of her ability to tune out the evils of judgment and jealousy that ultimately arose in response to her drive for freedom.

RACE AND RACISM

Despite its references to race, racism is not the central theme of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Instead, Hurston weaves race and racism into the society and culture in which Janie lives, but chooses to focus more on Janie's life experiences as a human being than as a black woman. In some ways, by not exclusively or predominantly focusing on race, the novel can portray race and racism in the American South in the early 20th century with great complexity.

Janie's unusual and beautiful appearance as a fair-skinned (¼ white) black woman living in the black American South sparks attention from the various communities she encounters throughout the novel, some of which are marked by racist attitudes. For instance, the character of Mrs. Turner presents a highly complicated instance of racism, as Mrs. Turner is a black

woman who is nonetheless extremely racist against blacks, particularly darker-skinned blacks.

Mrs. Turner scorns Janie's relationship with Tea Cake and repeatedly begs Janie to date her light-skinned brother. Given her identity as a black woman, Mrs. Turner's racism against blacks indicates that race is not a marker of real difference. Those who espouse superiority of one kind over another can find any pretext, any trait, to base those assertions on. Racism in the novel can be understood, then, as a set of rather ridiculous prejudices that exist in society, not a universal or stable system based on truth, which in turn makes its brutal effects (such as slavery in general and the rape of Nanny and its aftermath), particularly devastating.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE HORIZON

Janie invokes the symbol of the horizon repeatedly throughout the novel; to Janie, the horizon symbolizes the realm of the possible, that which she can dream about. During her arranged marriage with Logan Killicks, Janie remarks that the stylish and ambitious Jody Starks shows her a glimpse of the horizon, meaning that he provides her with a vision of what her life could be like. Though after Jody, too, turns out to treat Janie poorly and stifle her voice, it is Tea Cake who ultimately provides Janie with access to the horizon: in her marriage with Tea Cake, Janie is able to find love, sexual satisfaction, independence ,and self-expression all at once, that which she has always dreamed of. For that reason, even after Tea Cakes death, Janie feels that she still has and always will have access to the metaphorical horizon.

THE PEAR TREE

Janie has her first experience of sexual awakening under the blooming pear tree in spring, just before her first kiss with Johnny Taylor. Throughout the novel, the pear tree symbolizes for Janie the feeling she experienced directly while sitting beneath it – the sense of possibility in life for a connection between the self and the natural world, and the feelings of sexual desire and love. Thus when looking at the sexualized imagery of the pear tree blossoms, Janie declares, "So this was a marriage!" Janie's conflation between sexual desire and marriage is an idea that is eventually debunked for Janie by her experiences with Jody, but is reinvigorated when she meets Tea Cake and finds that her marriage to him allows room for both sexual fulfillment and love. It is for this reason that Janie feels she has finally reached the horizon.

CHECKERS

Tea Cake invites Janie to play checkers when they first meet, making Janie feel equal in power to a man she is interested in for the first time in her life. The game of checkers symbolizes the way in which Tea Cake establishes a new romantic dynamic with Janie that allows her to find a voice, feel empowered and reach the horizon – it is a relationship that is completely different from that which she shared with her previous husbands. The game of checkers places Janie in an equal position to her lover, and symbolizes Tea Cake's fun-loving, playful worldview that excites and enlivens Janie's life. However, in checkers, as Janie herself notes, there is potential for cheating, showing the dangerous side of such a fun-loving approach to life, that ultimately brings upon Tea Cake's death in his decision to remain in the muck during the hurricane.

MULE

The image of the mule emerges repeatedly in different contexts throughout the novel, but remains consistent in its figurative meaning as a symbol of victimization and bondage. The image of the mule first appears when Nanny tells Janie that black women are the mules of the earth, meaning that they are the lowest creatures, used by others. It then appears again when Logan Killicks goes to buy a mule for Janie to use when working behind a plow; his forceful attempt to make Janie work makes her feel as though she herself is being treated as an animal. Finally, the mule reappears once again when the townspeople of Eatonville make fun of Matt Bonner's sad looking mule, which Janie pities. When Jody purchases the mule to appease Janie's sense of pity for it, the town regards Jody as a savior, and adopts the freed mule as a kind of emblem. Throughout the novel, the mule symbolizes victimization, a theme that appears throughout the novel in various ways.

THE HURRICANE

The hurricane symbolizes the all-powerful force of nature, which trumps even the most intense exertions of power by humans, such as Jody's abusive need for control, or Mrs. Turner's sense of racial hierarchy, or Tea Cake's physical strength. While the pear tree, also a symbolic element in nature, symbolizes the idea of harmony – between humans and nature, between sex and love – the hurricane symbolizes the senselessness of nature and its ultimate disregard for human needs. It is during the novel's climactic hurricane scene that Janie, Tea Cake and Motor Boat contemplate the existence of God most explicitly for the first time in the novel, questioning his existence and whether or not he even cares about humans if he does, in fact, exist.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by time. That is the life of men.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

This abstract, almost allegorical paragraph opens the novel. Janie has not yet appeared, striding back through Eatonville after a long disappearance.

In these first crucial sentences, Hurston introduces independence and desire as two of the novel's themes: here, the unnamed men look towards the ever-receding horizon, a symbol of freedom and possibility. These men all want the ships' invisible, imagined cargo, though some cannot access it and so they turn away "in resignation." (Note that Hurston calls these individuals "Watchers," gesturing to the book's title.) Janie, the protagonist, grapples with her own desire for independence and fulfilling romantic love throughout the novel, explaining to Pheoby (several chapters later) that she has traveled to "de horizon and back."

However, the word "men" is hardly synonymous with *mankind* — Hurston describes women in the next paragraph, women who "forget all those thins they don't want to remember" and display much more pragmatism than men.In this way, readers begin to understand the importance of gender in the novel, as well as Janie's own curious position in society. Her desire for independence and experience seems more stereotypically masculine than feminine, alienating her from men and women alike.

Chapter 2 Quotes

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage!

Related Characters: Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Janie explains to Pheoby that her "conscious life" begins with the pear tree: a young Janie lies under the blooming and buzzing tree for hours at a time, watching the communion of flowers and bees.

This becomes one of the novel's central images, informing Janie's understanding of a reciprocated romantic love. Neither bee nor flower dominates or hurts the other — they are equals, united in their embrace. Of course, Hurston's language here is as lush and abundant as the tree itself and she zeroes in on the smallest, sexualized details (including "the dust-bearing bee" and "the thousand sister-calyxes"). Even the exclamation mark after "marriage" mirrors the tree's pseudo-sexual climax, its "ecstatic shiver."

Janie witnesses this insemination, this marriage, at a young age and yet cannot find the same beauty in her own relationships with Logan and Jody, neither of whom treats her as an equal. Even Janie's posture — she stretches under the tree — matches the "arch" of the flowers towards the insect. Only Tea Cake truly loves Janie as a bee loves a blossom, stirring up in her a "soul-crushing love."

"Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see...De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see."

Related Characters: Nanny Crawford (speaker), Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

When Nanny catches sight of Janie kissing Johnny Taylor, she calls her in to the house and broaches the topic of marriage. Janie is a woman now, she explains, and she should therefore marry a "decent" suitor like Logan Killicks, rather than someone "trashy." Janie's resistance leads Nanny to describe their world's social hierarchy: white men at the top, black women at the bottom.

Hurston here introduces the symbolic mule, which comes to stand for victimization, particularly that of many of the novel's black women. Again and again Janie pushes back against her fate, a life of thankless physical and emotional labor without freedom or joy. Logan Killicks, her first husband, even buys her a mule and Janie sees her own plight reflected in the animal.

Not only does this section have symbolic value, but it also raises questions about Hurston's endless shifts between dialect and a more traditional narrative voice. In this way, Hurston puts the two styles on a single plane, proving to her contemporaneous readers that all dialects have equal literary merit. As they navigate this complicated text, one in which no register is ever stable, readers must remain engaged and attentive — authority, particularly in the novel's world, can reside within grammar and diction.

Chapter 3 Quotes

She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Logan Killicks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 3, Janie discusses her romantic woes with Nanny: now three months married, Janie still feels no affection for Logan. Nanny encourages her to "wait awhile," and yet in the privacy of her room, she prays for Janie's future. Nanny dies at the end of the chapter, and Janie begins "to stand around the gate and expect things" again.

Here, the narrator associates womanhood with disillusionment — Janie only becomes a woman when she understands that marriage does not "compel love like the sun the day." Readers can consider this definition in conjunction with Nanny's earlier one, her conviction that Janie is a woman *because* she has kissed Johnny Taylor.

The relationship between marriage and love is a thorny, messy one throughout the novel, following Janie's first experience of the pear tree. She sees the love shared by bees and flowers and thinks: So this was marriage! Yet she goes on to enter, and then leave, two unfortunate marriages, both devoid of passion and mutual respect. Hurston hardly wants to prove Janie wrong; instead, she encourages us to consider the complexity of marriage, at once a legal contract and an emotional one.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Jody Starks

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Janie meets Jody Starks while Logan is away, buying a second mule in Lake City. She is intrigued by his "citified, stylish" manner, and they end up meeting every day and discussing his ambitions. In this section, Janie has not yet decided to elope with him, but harbors certain doubts "because he [does] not represent sun-up and pollen."

Here, Janie has a sort of premonition, a sense that Jody will not provide the love and passion she so desperately desires: he has nothing of the pear tree about him, but only the "far horizon." Yet the horizon is still an important symbol to Janie, and Jody's worldliness and style give her a glimpse of the world beyond her small town. She wants experience and excitement in addition to a perfect love; though Jody can only deliver the former, she still decides to run off with him, abandoning Logan (who offers neither).

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home."

Related Characters: Jody Starks (speaker), Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

The town congregates in Jody's store and celebrates his success, agreeing that he should serve as a temporary mayor. While he accepts the townspeople's congratulations, he does not accept their suggestion that Janie make a speech — "her place is in de home," seen but not heard.

Of course, this leaves Janie feeling "cold" on the way home, not quite resentful but certainly wary of Jody's attitude towards womanhood and marriage. Readers can view this moment as another warning sign, foreshadowing the inevitable rupture between the two characters. Jody wishes to control and master Janie; he does not wish for emotional and intellectual equality with her. Indeed, he speaks with astonishing condescension in this quote, referring to her in the third person, making no acknowledgment of her presence or her personal desires.

This moment might remind readers of Nanny Crawford's assertion that a black woman is society's "mule." In many ways, Jody defies social conventions by becoming mayor, a traditionally white role; yet he does not allow his wife to do the same, to become a person rather than a possession.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ "Nature is de first of everything. Ever since self was self, nature been keepin' folks off of red-hot stoves. Dat caution you talkin' 'bout ain't nothin' but uh humbug."

Related Characters: Sam Watson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Lige Moss and Sam Watson, two townspeople, engage in a long, playful conversation about nature and caution, attempting to answer the question: "Whut is it dat keeps uh man from gettin' burnt on uh red-hotstove—caution or nature?" Sam argues for nature, Lige for caution, and all ofEatonville seems to gather around the two men, including Janie herself.

This discussion of nature and control calls to mind many of the book's themes. Sam believes that nature is the first and "strongest" thing God made, that everything else (including human ideas of caution) is simply a byproduct of nature. Janie's experience of the world corresponds to Sam's cosmology: she first witnesses the pear tree, nature at its ecstatic peak, and this memory becomes a standard by which she judges all relationships. Again and again, Janie acts according to her instincts, throwing caution to the wind when she runs off with first Jody, then Tea Cake. Hurston rarely presents caution in a favorable light and her heroine's choices, however rash, always seem inevitable, not so much right as natural and instinctive.

❝ "Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much bout us as you think you do."

Related Characters: Janie Crawford (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Robbins begs Jody for a free cut of meat, explaining that her husband does not provide for their family. Though Jody consents, he gives her an amount far smaller than the desired hunk and goes on to mock her dramatic behavior with other men — they agree that her husband spoils her, that no man should allow his wife such liberties. In response, Janie delivers a cutting speech, accusing the men of cowardice and arrogance.

This is the first time that Janie speaks her mind and breaks free from her role as Jody's docile wife; it's a pivotal moment, one in which Janie displays empathy as well as courage and conviction. She implies that God has a particular relationship with women, an idea that's borne out throughout the novel. Women, particularly wives who endure scorn and abuse, have a clearer understanding of social dynamics and manipulation, and even of religious truths (especially Christian ideals like humility and martyrdom).

However, Chapter 6 does not end on this rousing note; instead, it ends with Jody's reply. He tells Janie to "fetch" his checkerboard, since she is too "moufy." The game of checkers goes on to become a symbol of Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, a symbol of equality and playfulness. Here, Jody does not even consider Janie as a potential player — she is only a kind of servant, a beautiful possession.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Janie attempts to explain herself to the dying Jody, which only makes him defensive and upset. He breathes his last with "a sound of strife in his throat" — and in the immediate aftermath of his death, Janie evaluates her own reflection and lets down her hair.

Her hair is a sort of weathervane, indicating to characters and readers alike how free and powerful she feels at any given moment. In the novel's first scene, for instance, the men of Eatonville notice the "great rope of black hair swinging to her waist" as she strides through town: she is a new woman, acquainted with the complexities of love and desire. And Jody first notices her "heavy hair" as she stands by the water pump. Yet she keeps her hair tied up throughout their married life, as their relationship is not egalitarian or fair but lopsided. She is more servant than wife; only after his death can she free herself and her hair.

And yet Janie's luxurious hair, along with her lighter skin, is also a burden, something that obsesses and confuses other people. Mrs. Turner, a character with a fraught relationship to her own ethnicity, is sure that Janie and her brother would make an excellent match because Janie's appearance is not offensive to her. While Janie's hair stands for her freedom and sexuality, it can also disempower her.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon – for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you – and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her.

Related Characters: Nanny Crawford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

In the days after Jody's death, Janie contemplates her past, including her relationship with Nanny. She feels a sudden resentment towards her grandmother, who married her off to a loveless, greedy man.

Janie's eyes always drift back to the horizon in Hurston's novel; here, the word "horizon" seems to mean love (or marriage). As a young woman, Janie wanted nothing more than a fulfilling romantic life, and yet Nanny used her granddaughter's desire against her, coercing her into marriage. Janie dreamed of love, the horizon, and Nanny "pinched it" into a more convenient shape, a profitable alliance with a rich man, but one that also ended up choking her.

Not only does this visceral image remind readers of slavery and Nanny's own life as a slave, but it raises essential questions: How can language shape reality? How can Janie control her own story? Nanny uses rhetoric as a weapon against Janie; however, the younger woman herself emerges as the final narrator, recounting her story to Pheoby. (Note Hurston's use of the second person — "the horizon is still way beyond you" — in a section about authority and voice.)

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 10, Tea Cake enters Janie's store, buys a pack of cigarettes, and challenges her to a game of checkers. She feels an immediate affinity for him, the first man who has treated her as an equal.

Hurston makes Janie's relief clear in this passage: the concise sentences and the repetition of the subject "somebody" (and the verb "play") reveal to readers Janie's state of mind, her happy amazement. Jody played checkers too, but Jody only ever asked her to "fetch" the game, never to play a game *with* him. This quiet moment between Tea Cake and Janie has their entire dynamic locked up within it — the playfulness, the respect, the attraction, and even the danger. (She appraises his body the way men have appraised her body throughout the novel.) Tea Cake wins the game, but Janie reaches out to stop him and they touch for the first time.

Of course, like any game, Checkers leaves room for dishonesty and cheating. Janie knows this and articulates it, and yet it does not stop her from beginning her most fulfilling and exciting relationship.

Chapter 11 Quotes

He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God.

Related Characters: Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Janie and Tea Cake spend more and more time together. One night they go fishing, and on another he plays her music and combs her hair. She finds this sudden intimacy at once confusing and refreshing.

Here, Hurston alludes very obviously to the first pear tree passage: Janie concludes that Tea Cake could be a"bee to a blossom," fitting into her original notion of romantic love and marriage. Hurston repeats and then expands upon the word "blossom" in the second sentence, bringing Tea Cake's lushness and excess into the text itself. And she does the same thing in the third and fourth sentences, repeating the word "crushing" and then elaborating on it. All of these repetitions and fragments slow down the plot, making this moment into a sort of dream or fantasy.

Hurston concludes this passage with the sentence: "He was a glance from God." This allusion, too, is an obvious gesture at the novel's title. Many characters are "Watchers" in Hurston's work — they *watch* the horizon or God or something else. But how then do we understand a character who is himself not a watcher, but a "glance?"

Chapter 13 Quotes

The thing made itself into pictures and hung around Janie's bedside all night long. Anyhow, she wasn't going back to Eatonville to be laughed at and pitied. She had ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Janie and Tea Cake head to Jacksonville, where they marry and rent a room. However, when Tea Cake disappears one morning, Janie begins to consider the cautionary tale of Annie Tyler, an elderly woman abandoned and robbed by her young lover, Who Flung. In this section, "the thing" is Annie Tyler's unfortunate demise.

Janie's despair lurks below the surface of this passage. In an attempt to distract herself, she has already cleaned the room and sipped coffee with the landlady. And yet none of this dispels her fear; Annie Tyler's story seems to take on material weight — it makes "itself into pictures," a physical presence that suffocates and torments Janie.

However, in three short sentences, Janie manages to bolster her own resolve and find a sort of peace. The word "Anyhow" signals to readers that Janie has extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness. Though Tea Cake may have taken her two hundred dollars, Janie still has money in the bank, unlike poor Annie Tyler: the snappy parallelism "ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank" points to Janie's optimism, her independence, and her enduring good spirits.

He drifted off into sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

Tea Cake goes off gambling one night, only to return battered and bruised, covered in cuts. Despite his wounds, his earnings are considerable — three hundred and twenty two dollars — and this gambling prowess astonishes Janie. She watches him as he falls asleep, feeling a pure love for her new husband.

Readers might consider the verb "crush" in this passage and its relation to the earlier sentences in Chapter 11: "He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world... Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took." Does this verb, at once violent and sensual, encapsulate the relationship between Tea Cake and Janie? Hurston even elaborates on Janie's psychic state here: the violence of her "self-crushing love" opens something within her, allowing "her soul [to crawl] out from its hiding place." We're seemingly not meant to understand this paradoxical image — something crushing shut in order for something else to crawl out — but only to appreciate and *feel* it.The verb "crawl" also reminds us of insects, bees buzzing around a blooming tree, in yet another allusion to Janie's pear tree experience of childhood.

Chapter 15 Quotes

Janie seethed. But Tea Cake never let go. They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; till he hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Though Janie loves their new life in the Everglades, she soon suspects that Tea Cake has become attached to someone else, a young woman named Nunkie. When she finds them "struggling" together in the sugar cane field, she confronts Tea Cake and they resolve the dispute with their bodies.

In this passage, violence and love are inextricable: Hurston uses the language of battle, verbs like "seethe" and "wrestle" and "hurl," to describe a sexual encounter. (We can see the heightening tension in the text itself, which features an accumulation of phrases beginning with "till.") And yet Hurston does not paint a picture of marital abuse or injustice. Unlike Jody or Logan, Tea Cake treats Janie as a relative equal, without humiliating her or manipulating her.

Hurston also writes that Janie and Tea Cake "express the inexpressible" with their bodies. Words suddenly fail them and they must resort to another, more primal and urgent language. This raises important questions about verbal and non-verbal communication in the book — when can a character transcend language? And is this instance, in which Tea Cake has sex with Janie instead of apologizing to her or discussing her worries, an example of action actually being more problematic and confusing than language?

Chapter 16 Quotes

"Tain't de poorness, it's de color and de features. Who want any lil ole black baby layin' up in de baby buggy lookin' lak uh fly in buttermilk? Who wants to be mixed up wid uh rusty black man, and uh black woman goin' down de street in all dem loud colors, and whoopin' and hollerin' and laughin' over nothin'?"

Related Characters: Mrs. Turner (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Janie befriends the elderly Mrs. Turner, who reveals a deep-seated hatred for her "black kinfolks." She berates Janie for her marriage to a dark-skinned man and asserts that "black ones is holdin' us [herself and Janie] back."

This is a poignant scene, one of the first instances in which Janie is explicitly praised for her "Caucasian" good looks. Mrs. Turner makes no attempt to disguise her own prejudice, her unequivocal preference for lighter-skinned people (itself a result of internalized white racism, and an entire social system that praises whiteness over blackness). She even compares a black child to a "fly in buttermilk," implying that blackness is undesirable, unsanitary, and

unnecessary.

And yet Mrs. Turner's description of "uh rusty black man" and woman "whoopin' and hollerin' and laughin'" cannot stir up any disgust in Janie because this ease and good humor and playfulness are exactly the things she loves about the Everglades. What Mrs. Turner finds repulsive and embarrassing, Janie finds warm and inviting. Hurston shows us that Mrs. Turner's hatred is a hatred for life itself, in all its "loud colors" and laughter.

❝ It was inevitable that she should accept any inconsistency and cruelty from her deity as all good worshippers do from theirs. All gods who receive homage are cruel. All gods dispense suffering without reason. Otherwise they would not be worshipped. Through indiscriminate suffering men know fear and fear is the most divine emotion. It is the stones for altars and the beginning of wisdom. Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers. Real gods require blood.

Related Characters: Mrs. Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Tea Cake asks Janie to shun Mrs. Turner, and yet the old woman is dogged and determined to spend time with someone she considers her superior. In this passage, Hurston's description of Mrs. Turner's relationship with Janie morphs into a more abstract discussion of divinity and worship.

Mrs. Turner can "forgive" Janie's deliberate snubs because she has put Janie on a sort of altar, giving her license to "dispense suffering without reason." Janie has become a god, even if a cruel one, in Mrs. Turner's eyes. But despite this interpretation of Hurston's analogy, this passage remains curious and unexpected, as the (usually discreet) omniscient narrator takes centerstage. The digression demands the reader's attention.

We might say that Hurston's novel is about power, race, sexuality, love, or bravery. But would we say that the book is also about "indiscriminate suffering?" Do all of the characters fit into the narrator's model, making sacrifices for a God who deals in "inconsistency and cruelty?"

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ "Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be. Dat's de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it."

Related Characters: Tea Cake (speaker), Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Sop-de-Bottom praises Janie's docility, explaining to Tea Cake that most wives are far more combative. Tea Cake adds on to this praise; though he wishes to give Janie a better life, he is also glad that she "is wherever [he] wants tuh be."

While Janie's marriage to Tea Cake is certainly more fair and loving than either of her previous marriages, readers are meant to understand that it is still a complex, imperfect relationship. Tea Cake shows a certain masculine narcissism in his conversation with Sob-de-Bottom, zeroing in on his own expectations (and repeating the pronoun "Ah") rather than considering Janie's own independent needs and desires. He loves her, but he does not quite love the full, mysterious scope of her — he only loves what he can possess. Hurston reminds us again that a black women is "society's mule," even when she is a beloved wife. No romantic relationship is without its hierarchy.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ The wind came back with triple fury, and put out the light for the last time. They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

Janie and Tea Cake (and Motor Boat) disregard the hurricane warnings — the quiet air, the fleeing animals — and remain by the lake during the storm. The winds are fiercer than they anticipate, extinguishing their last lamp and leaving them in the dark.

This is one of the novel's most exciting and harrowing scenes, and it's a scene in which nature plays a crucial role. Janie and Tea Cake suffer for their arrogance, their faith in nice weather and safety, and they learn that they are at the mercy of nature, not in control of it. In a way, this moment reminds readers of Janie's early encounters with nature — as she examines the pear tree, she understands that her own life should follow similar patterns of desire and love. And yet when she and Tea Cake do not accept that they belong to the natural world, the storm mocks them with its power.

Of course, this passage also contains within it the novel's title: they seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. Not only does this render the scene even more climactic, but it also asks readers to consider how this moment sheds light on the book's general themes. What role does God play in Hurston's work? Might the passage about Mrs. Turner's piety have something to do with this quote?

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Tea Cake was lying with his eyes closed and Janie hoped he was asleep. He wasn't. A great fear had took hold of him. What was this thing that set his brains fire and grabbed at his throat with iron fingers? Where did it come from and why did it hang around him?

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

Tea Cake and Janie return to the muck, following the former's brief but unpleasant stint as a gravedigger. However, Tea Cake soon falls ill, having contracted rabies during the hurricane. In despair, Janie pleads with an unresponsive God.

Tea Cake's disease is not only a direct consequence of the hurricane, but also a reminder that the young man belongs to the natural world and must abide by its laws. One lyrical rhetorical question follows another in this passage and the answer is obvious to the reader, if not to Janie and Tea Cake: *nature* has "set his brains fire" because of his arrogance, his refusal to heed any warning. For the first time, Tea Cake is more object than subject, the passive victim of "great fear" and "iron fingers." (Even Hurston's grammar reflects this change.)

Hurston uses the expression "hang around" in an earlier passage too, describing Janie's fear of abandonment in Chapter 13. With this repetition in mind, readers can consider how Janie's flaws and Tea Cake's unite and separate them all at once.

❝ She talked. . . . She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Janie is brought before a jury after Tea Cake's death. Her friends all abandon her, siding with her deceased husband instead — all except Dr. Simmons, who testifies in her favor and explains the situation. And finally, Janie herself speaks, recounting the entire story.

While readers might expect Hurston to relate this scene in dialect, she instead combines narration and dialogue. In other words, the novel's two primary voices converge in Janie's testimony — and this raises questions about the book's structure, including its frame story. Do Janie and the omniscient narrator differ? Janie explains herself to the jury just as she will go on to explain herself to Pheoby. For the first time, no man interrupts her or demands her attention and she can speak freely, despite the threat of judgment.

Here, Hurston emphasizes Janie's honesty, her deliberate avoidance of "lying thoughts." By making her so suddenly transparent, Hurston puts her in a sort of blissful natural state. Her honesty corresponds to her physical wellbeing, and the "hush" after her testimony is natural and obvious.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons. Dis house ain't so absent of things lak it used tuh be befo' Tea Cake come along. It's full uh thoughts, 'specially dat bedroom."

Related Characters: Janie Crawford (speaker), Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Having wrapped up her tale, Janie tells Pheoby that she is ready to begin her life in Eatonville anew. Her experiences of the world do not torment her so much as provide her with happy memories.

In the novel's opening paragraph, Hurston describes the bleak "life of men," those who keep their eyes trained on the horizon and yet never move towards it. Janie follows her own path, however, and Hurston reintroduces the horizon in the novel's final chapter in order to differentiate these unhappy men from Janie, who has 'been tuh de horizon and back." Despite setbacks and hurricanes and abuse, Janie finds companionship and love, as well as independence. (Her use of the first person and the possessive "mah house" is especially powerful.)

Janie tells Pheoby that her house is no longer "absent of things" — in this way, Hurston makes a sort of reflexive gesture towards the power of narrative. Janie's own life story will keep her company in the coming years.

❝ Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish net…She called in her soul to come and see.

Related Characters: Janie Crawford, Tea Cake

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Janie retires for the night, yet she stays up reliving her recent memories of Tea Cake's death and the trial. She understands that Tea Cake can "never be dead" as long as she protects his memory.

This is a striking image — a person's thoughts and memories projected "against the wall" — not dissimilar from Janie's moment of anxiety in Chapter 13, when her fear makes "itself into pictures and [hangs around her bedside] all night long." In other words, Huston imagines a world in which the boundary between internal and external is porous. Readers might consider whether or not this permeability relates to the boundary between omniscient narration and dialogue in the novel.

Not only does Hurston circle back to the first chapter by way of the symbolic horizon, but she hints at an ocean in both moments, too. She mentions a ship in the first paragraph and a "great fish-net" in the final one, giving a slight Biblical undercurrent to her work. (In the New Testament, Christ calls his disciples "fishers of men," and several of them are former fishermen.) With this ending and the obvious connections between fishing and storytelling, Hurston turns her novel into a sort of fairytale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is about both the language of power and the power of language.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

An unnamed woman returns at sunset to a small town in the American South that was once a place she called home. The townspeople, the woman's former neighbors, are sitting together on Pheoby Watson's porch and speculate about why the woman might be returning to town by herself –- and why she's now wearing dirty overalls instead of the blue satin dress she used to wear. Watching the woman approach, without thinking even "to swallow spit," the townspeople mockingly wonder why the woman isn't accompanied by the young man who she left town with in the first place, and smugly guess that he must have run off and stolen her money.

Janie's anonymity makes both her return and the townspeople's gossiping very mysterious. The townspeople's curiosity about what happened to Janie foreshadows the soon to be revealed fact that the novel in fact begins at the end *of Janie's story, and points to the novel's important theme of storytelling and language. The malicious tone of their gossip, described as "spit," also speaks to the pervasive theme of judgment and jealousy throughout the novel.*

At the same time, the women watching the woman envy her beauty, while the men admire her fit body and luxuriously long and straight black hair.

The sexualized details of Janie's beauty explain some of the neighbor's jealousy. Her long straight black hair suggests Janie's part-white heritage, and therefore perhaps a racial origin for that jealousy as well.

Interrupting the judgmental gossiping of the other townspeople, Pheoby Watson identifies herself as the woman's best friend, and notes with surprise that even she doesn't know why the woman has returned. At this moment, the woman's identity is revealed: her named is Janie Starks, and she left town with a man called Tea Cake, who was much younger than Janie. In response, a woman named Pearl Stone expresses resentment that Janie returned without announcement or even talking to anyone in the town. Pheoby defends her friend and goes off to prepare Janie dinner.

The townspeople's gossiping lacks real context. Their disdain for Janie's relationship with the young Tea Cake introduces the novel's theme of love between men and women, and traditional perceptions underlying judgments of it. Pheoby's allegiance to Janie calls attention to the unfairness of the townspeople, and implies potential for a good reason for Janie's behavior.

Pheoby brings Janie a small plate of dinner and compliments Janie on still looking so young and womanly, despite her shabby clothing. Pheoby criticizes the townspeople for their judgmental speculations about Janie and the reasons for her return, though she then proceeds to ask Janie herself about Tea Cake, and whether or not he stole her money or ran off with another woman.

Pheoby's kindness reveals that Janie is, at least in part, a sympathetic figure, not the scoundrel the townspeople make her out to be. Yet Pheoby's simultaneous curiosity and preemptive judgments of Tea Cake also indicate that she shares some of the townspeople's perceptions and judgments.

With a laugh about the townspeople's mean-spirited gossip, Janie tells her friend with calm self-assurance that no one should worry about her; without any elaboration or detail, Janie explains that she has traveled "tuh de horizon and back." She has returned to Eatonville because Tea Cake is gone and she was no longer happy in the Everglades, where she and Tea Cake were living together after their marriage. Pheoby responds to Janie's vague explanation with understandable confusion, asking Janie to explain. Janie tells her story.

Janie's ability to tune out the townspeople's gossip shows that she has reached inner peace. Her explanation for her return and Pheoby's confusion introduces the theme of storytelling: the novel is the product of Janie telling her own story. The division between Hurston's literary language and the characters' colloquial dialect reveals Hurston's interest in the theme of language, and in insisting that the dialect is just as valid or important as the literary language.

CHAPTER 2

Janie is raised by her grandmother Nanny, and never met her mother or father. Janie and Nanny live in the backyard guesthouse of the Washburns, a white couple in the neighborhood. Growing up in such close proximity to a white family, Janie mistakenly thinks that she is white until she's shown a photograph of herself.

The absence of Janie's mother and father and the presence of Nanny as her surrogate parent emphasize that these unusual childhood circumstances must have shaped Janie's identity – regarding her sense of self, family, and race in particular.

The kids at Janie's predominantly black school pick on her because of her light skin and absent parents. To provide Janie with a greater sense of stability in her life, Nanny eventually buys a small plot of land, which Janie specifically describes as having a gate at its front.

The black students practice a kind of racism against Janie because she's different. Nanny seeks to give Janie a more secure social footing by gaining material independence—leaving the Washburn's and buying her own home.

Janie receives her first kiss from Johnny Taylor over that gate when she is sixteen. The day of the kiss, Janie spends the day under a blossoming pear tree in Nanny's yard. Janie is moved by the fertility of the tree, finding its shift from winter dryness to springtime suppleness inexplicable and exciting. She is stimulated by the feeling that the natural world around her is breathing with life – that the blossoming tree experiences an "ecstatic shiver" and the blossoms are "creaming...and frothing with delight." After this highly sexualized description of the tree, Janie thinks to herself "So this was a marriage!" Wrapped up in the atmosphere of spring, Janie experiences a sexual awakening and kisses Johnny Taylor.

Janie's experience under the blossoming pear tree in spring marks her own "blossoming" as a sexually mature woman, now ready to kiss and be kissed by men such as Johnny Taylor. References to the pear tree resurface throughout the novel in order to allude to Janie's preoccupation with sexual desire. It is important to note that in her adolescent innocence, Janie intuitively equates sexual desire with marriage—sex with love and love with marriage—an idea that affects her decision-making later in the novel.

Nanny notices Janie and Johnny kiss from inside the house, and quickly arranges for Janie to marry Logan Killicks, a rich, middle-aged local farmer. Nanny explains that she doesn't want to see Janie distracted by youthful sexual excitement, and instead envisions for her granddaughter a life of financial security alongside a well-established husband like Logan. Nanny further explains that black women are the mules of the world, and she doesn't want such a low place in society for her granddaughter.

Nanny sees sexual desire as dangerous, not wonderful. She sees it as something that threatens Janie's independence and financial well-being. Her comment about black women being mules of the world shows that she believes that the only way for a black woman to be independent is through financial security. But given Janie's belief that sexual desire=marriage, Nanny's practical-minded decision for Janie to marry the older, wealthy Logan is bound to be unfulfilling for Janie.

When Janie protests against marrying Logan, Nanny defends her decision by describing her own difficult past. Nanny was born into slavery and during the Civil War was raped by her master. As a result of that rape, she gave birth to Leafy, a half-black woman with fair skin and gray eyes. The wife of Nanny's master picked up on the fact that her husband must be Leafy's father and, furious, planned to have Nanny brutally whipped and for Leafy to be sold away as soon as the baby turned a month old. Luckily, Nanny was able to escape with Leafy into the southern marshland, where they hid until the Civil War came to an end.

Nanny's brutal past as a slave gives the references to race in the novel more power and significance, as Nanny's past is of course also part of Janie's own identity and personal history. Nanny's story illuminates the reason for Janie's light-skin and thus indirectly explains one underlying reason for Janie's issues regarding self-image and race. The story also illustrates why Nanny emphasizes financial security as crucial for a black woman.

Nanny explains that she initially dreamed of providing a better life for Leafy, but those dreams were dashed when Leafy was then raped by her schoolteacher, who impregnated her with Janie. After Leafy gave birth to Janie, she started to drink every night and then fled to try to escape what had happened, leaving Nanny and Janie behind at the Washburns. Then Nanny shifted her hopes for a better life to Janie.

Nanny's traumatic past explains why she has so forcefully protected Janie. Yet at the same time Nanny's explanation foreshadows the unfortunate truth that Janie's marriage to Logan must inevitably sour, as it's not based on Janie's own sexual desire. The prospect of marrying Logan does not give her any feeling of excitement like the pear tree, because it is merely the product of Nanny's own hopes and dreams for her, not Janie's own hopes and dreams for herself. Janie, at this point, is under Nanny's control, even if it is a loving control.

CHAPTER 3

During the anxious "few days to live before" marrying Logan Killicks, Janie contemplates whether or not she will ever grow to love her future husband, resolving eventually to comfort herself: to believe what Nanny and other adults assure her – that she will in fact eventually love Logan and be happy. Janie and Logan get married in Nanny's home – with a luxurious feast and celebration. Afterward, the new husband and wife set out on Logan's wagon to his house and his "often-mentioned sixty acres."

Janie does not feel authentic sexual desire for Logan and thus becomes aware that her views about marriage and gender diverge from those of her grandmother. Janie's decision to convince herself that she will eventually love Logan emerges from her allegiance to Nanny and her understanding of how Nanny's past traumatic experiences have conditioned her to seek the more traditional virtue of security for her granddaughter.

Two months pass while Janie "waits for love to begin" for her new husband until she returns home to visit Nanny. When she does return, Janie complains to Nanny about the absence of feeling in her marriage and how she yearns for something "sweet" in her marriage, like "when you sit under a pear tree."

Even though Janie now has financial stability in her life, she becomes increasingly aware of her distinctive idea of love –in her mind, love is equated with the sexual desire and passion she felt beneath the pear tree but does not with Logan.

Janie is then met with severe criticism: Nanny calls attention to Logan's wealth, again making reference to his sixty-acres of property, and reprimands Janie for not appreciating how lucky she is to be so financially secure. Nanny sends Janie back to her new home, again assuring her that she will soon grow to love Logan.

Janie's marriage to Logan can be seen as the product of Janie's submissive role in relation to her controlling grandmother – again, even if it is a loving control. Nanny projects her own fear of the instability she herself experienced onto Janie, and as a result of this insecurity, attempts to control Janie.

After Janie leaves, Nanny prays that God will take care of her granddaughter. Within a month, Nanny dies. Through her marriage to Logan, Janie's dream of marriage bringing about love or somehow being equivalent to it is proven wrong. As a result, she feels that she has become a woman.

After Nanny's death, Janie can think for herself about sex, love, marriage and identity. After realizing that marriage does not bring about love – and by extension, sexual desire – Janie self-identifies as a woman, both because she has the experience to be able to differentiate between sex, love and marriage and because she has experienced disappointment at the hands of men.

CHAPTER 4

Over time, Logan becomes not only less affectionate toward Janie, but begins to boss her around aggressively and reprimand her for not being gracious and willing to help out with household labor. Janie stands up to herself and Logan repeats that he thinks Janie is spoiled.

Logan's unkind treatment of Janie validates her expression of resistance toward marrying him in the first place. Even though Logan has lots of money and land, his demanding treatment of Janie makes it so that she actually doesn't experience any improvement in her material reality, a fact that points out the flaws with Nanny's traditional worldviews about marriage.

One morning, Logan leaves home to go buy a second mule so that Janie and he can both productively plow the fields. While Logan is away buying the mule, Janie spots a stylish and charismatic young man in town, who goes by the name of Joe Starks. They meet eyes and begin to flirt, as Joe tells Janie of his desire to "be a big voice," to achieve greatness. Specifically, Joe informs Janie of his plan: having arrived from Georgia, Joe plans to move to and establish himself in a predominantly black town nearby in Florida. Janie notes that while Joe does not "represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees," he nonetheless "spoke for far horizon," and this is why she finds herself so attracted to him.

While Logan is looking for ways to make Janie work, Joe makes her dream. Immediately after meeting Joe Starks, Janie says with confidence that he "spoke for far horizon." The idea of the horizon is an important symbol for Janie – it alludes to the idea of possibility, that which Janie may still imagine, the unknowable that can be dreamt about. It is significant that Janie makes this assessment of Joe before actually knowing him; this indicates the impetuous nature of desire (her desires in particular) and her tendency to map ideas about desire onto what it means to love and be loved.

Joe stays around town for what is presumably longer than he had expected to, and sees Janie each day in secret. Joe asks Janie to refer to him by a special nickname – Jody. After scoffing at the idea of Logan making "a dog outa" his wife by forcing her to work behind a plow, Jody tells Janie that a woman of her beauty is meant simply to sit on a front porch and look beautiful. With these thoughts in mind, Jody asks Janie to leave Logan and marry him instead.

While Jody's criticism of Logan and how he treats Janie is apt – that he treats her like a dehumanized animal – the alternative situation of married life that Jody presents to Janie foreshadows the problems of Janie and Jody's marriage. That is, Jody desires Janie as a wife that will be silent, obedient and show no other virtues other than her physical beauty in order to allow him total control. But to Janie, forced to plow the fields every day, that vision sure sounds nice.

When Logan returns, Janie and he fight again: Logan reiterates his belief that Janie is spoiled and ungrateful, and Janie threatens to run away. The next morning, with the fight of the previous night still unresolved, Logan and Janie continue to bicker. Logan attempts to force Janie to help him out on the field, and she responds by saying that she will never love him or treat him like some kind of god – especially not in the way he expects her to. After a painful end to their fight, Janie immediately runs off to reunite with Jody at a nearby secretly-arranged location and time. They marry before sundown and together run away to the new town.

Janie's fights with Logan indicate that within her first marriage, she is slowly but surely gaining a voice and ability to express herself, though perhaps not in a way that will actually get her needs fulfilled. At this stage in their new relationship, Jody offers Janie a sense of the "horizon" – of possibility and hope that was unbeknownst to her in her marriage with Logan. Whether or not Jody is the perfect match for Janie remains unclear, but it is clear that each step Janie makes is bringing her closer to a fuller and deeper sense of herself.

CHAPTER 5

When Jody and Janie arrive to the new Florida town called Eatonville, they are surprised to find that it consists of just a dozen decrepit houses and nothing else. Jody confidently introduces himself to two town residents – Lee Coker and Amos Hicks – and requests to see the town mayor. After learning that the town has no mayor, Jody continues to talk to the two men and other town citizens sitting on a nearby porch. During their conversation, Jody and Janie find out that the town is comprised of only 50 acres. In response to this new knowledge, Jody ostentatiously purchases – in cash – an extra two hundred acres from Captain Eaton, a principal donor of the town's already existent fifty acres. Meanwhile, Hicks flirts with Janie, though she is unresponsive; Coker then makes fun of Hicks for his futile attempt to seduce Janie away from her rich and powerful husband.

Unfulfilled by her marriage with Logan – even in terms of material advancement – Janie's new situation with the proud and powerful Jody smacks of the possibility for an improved life. Yet Jody's purchase of the land from Captain Eaton underscores Jody's constant need to give those around him performances of his power and control. This foreshadows both the fact that Jody's desire for public control outstrips his desire to focus on his wife and marriage, and the fact that his desire for total power over Eatonville also translates into a desire for total power over his wife Janie, who he otherwise does not pay much attention to at all.

Jody continues to make a name for himself in the town by announcing his plan to establish a store and post-office, and requests a town meeting. Even though a townsperson named Tony Taylor has already been named the assembly leader, Jody usurps his power and controls the entire meeting. Jody enlists Coker and Taylor as carpenters for the store, while making the remaining townspeople prepare the roads for construction and urge new residents to move to the town.

It becomes clear here that Jody's inflated sense of pride and ambition, which initially attracted Janie to him, is in fact a pathological desire to control the world around him, as exemplified by his usurpation of the town meeting and subsequent take-over of various aspects of the town in his role as mayor. Even though Jody declares his gestures are ones that will improve the community, he sets in motion a series of actions that ultimately will alienate the townspeople and cause them to resent his controlling behavior.

Jody makes back the money he spent buying the 200 acres by selling land to newly-arrived townspeople and through his now opened store. In response to all of these gestures, the townspeople collectively name Jody the town mayor. At the store, Taylor invites Janie to give a speech as the mayor's new wife, though Jody prohibits her from speaking and explains that wives are in no position to make speeches. Janie does not protest but is nonetheless disturbed by Jody's behavior.

Jody's refusal to allow Janie to speak in front of the townspeople is one of the first instances where we see the negative effects of Jody's ambitious, powerful side on his relationship with Janie. In particular, Jody seeks power over Janie by trying to silence her, to stifle her voice. Janie's reluctant decision not to react to Jody, and her discomfort with that decision, marks the first stage of her eventual recognition that it is important to her to be able to express her self, to have a voice.

In his new role as mayor, Jody declares that the town needs a street lamp. As such, he purchases the lamp and proceeds to call a town meeting in order to discuss the lamp and specifically to vote whether or not it should be installed. Jody organizes a ceremonial celebration for the lighting of the new lamp. Janie expresses a vague sense of dissatisfaction to Jody regarding his recent unavailability toward her – how he has been constantly occupied with his projects to build and fix things in the town. Jody provides her no consolation, but instead repeats that he has "aimed tuh be uh big voice."

Though it is not made explicit in the text itself, Jody's desire to bring a streetlight to Eatonville symbolizes his desire to play God. That is, God brings light to humankind in Genesis, and, similarly, Jody wants to bring light to the townspeople of Eatonville in order to situate himself as the most important man in town. His desire to have a symbolically "big voice" further emphasizes his attempt to stifle Janie's voice, to give her no voice. Jody sees power as something you can only have at someone else's expense.

In the coming weeks, Janie is aware of the simultaneous feelings of admiration and jealousy that the townspeople feel toward her and Jody. In particular, Janie senses envy in the townspeople's perception of their house – unlike the others in town, it has two stories and multiple porches, making the other houses in town appear as "servants" quarters surrounding the "big house."

Janie is able to be perceptive about the townspeople's feelings of jealousy toward her and Jody and their resentment about Jody's pride in particular, as she too is a victim of Jody's tendency to subjugate others. Their home is merely a concrete symbol of Jody's desire to recreate feelings of servitude among those in his population, in order to make himself feel important and secure, even if he creates a situation reminiscent of slavery with its "big house" and surrounding cabins.

Because Janie is kept silent by her husband, the townspeople can only speculate about why and how she might be able to be married to Jody, who has become known increasingly throughout town as unpleasantly domineering. In particular, they note the beauty of Janie's long hair, and Jody's controlling rule that she must tie it up in a rag while she is at work at his store. Despite the town's general awareness of Jody's overbearing sense of his own authority over them, the townspeople, like Janie, do not choose to put up a fight against him.

Janie's hair is a symbol of her fertility and sexuality, and also refers back to her identity as a mixed-race woman. Jody's need for Janie to cover up these parts of herself once again reveals his pathological need to have control – here, specifically, control over his wife's sexuality and unique sense of identity. The silence of the townspeople, in a position of servitude to Jody parallels that of Janie, implicitly emphasizing the intensity of Janie's silence as the bearer of the greatest amount of Jody's abuse.

CHAPTER 6

Janie feels limited by the repetitive nature of working in the store each day, but is amused by the townspeople's conversations on the porch that she can overhear, even if she is not directly engaged. In particular, the townspeople repeatedly make fun of a fellow Eatonville resident named Matt Bonner for his sad and tired looking mule. They often accuse him for being a bad owner and responsible for the mule's feeble appearance. One particular day, the townspeople on the porch decide to direct their playfully aggressive energy to the mule itself and purposefully bother the mule. Annoyed by the pointlessness of their immature behavior, Janie voices her feelings.

Janie's submissive role in her relationship with Jody is emphasized by the fact that her only amusement comes from listening to the conversations of townspeople – Jody deprives her of her own voice, and by expressing pleasure in listening, Janie moves toward the realization of her desire to express her own feelings and thoughts, to be a part of the conversation. The townspeople's jokes about Matt Bonner and his mule show another instance of the human impulse for power and control over others, not unlike that which defines Jody. Janie's sympathy for the mule indicates her sense of identification with another victim of subjugation, and she does then speak out.

Jody overhears Janie, and in order to quell Janie's anxiety about the mule's victimization, Jody purchases the mule from Matt Bonner for a mere five dollars, so that the townspeople will stop bothering it. Even though Janie's empathy for the mule is what catalyzed Jody's purchase of it, the townspeople focus instead on Jody's dignity in rescuing the mule from affliction, comparing Jody to Abraham Lincoln delivering slave emancipation.

Jody's purchase superficially appears benevolent both to the mule and to Janie, though the response of the townspeople –to elevate Jody to the level of Abraham Lincoln – reveals again that he is also after making a gesture that will emphasize his power. The townspeople's reference to Lincoln relates the issue of individual quests for power and control, such as that of Jody, to larger historical patterns of subjugation, such as the history of American slavery. Thus it is ironic when the townspeople connect Jody to Abraham Lincoln as a representative figure of freedom, since Jody is engaged in an effort to get power over them.

When the mule dies, Jody plans a funeral for it, as the mule had become a kind of mascot for the town of Eatonville. Even though the funeral draws residents from around the entire town and proves to be quite celebratory, Jody prohibits Janie's attendance, attributing his decision to his desire to preserve her high status by discouraging her attendance at such a lowly event.

The mule conjures broader theme of victimization and bondage, and thus can be seen in relation to Janie, herself a victim of Jody's domination and even the black race. In this way, Jody's decision to prohibit Janie's attendance from the mule's funeral – the very mule she was the catalyst for saving – is shown to be completely selfish, despite his rationalization. He cares more that Janie act in ways that promote his own power than about her own feelings or connections to others.

One day following the funeral, Janie finds herself annoyed at Jody and instead of remaining silent, she plainly tells him, "You sho loves to tell me whut to do, but Ah can't tell you nothin' Ah see." After Jody berates her in an attempt to push her back into her submissive role, Janie realizes the futility of her fight and decides to "press her teeth together and...hush."

At this moment, Janie shows herself to be aware of her desire for self-expression, though simultaneously aware of the consequences of attempting to achieve it. This state of ambivalence is one that ultimately drives Janie to erupt at Jody later in the novel, so is ultimately important in causing her to realize the importance of finding a voice for herself.

Meanwhile, outside on the porch, Pheoby's husband Sam Watson and fellow townspeople argue about the question of nature versus nurture – specifically whether humans stay away from hot stoves because of natural instinct to avoid heat, or because they have been conditioned to avoid it. Jody joins in the conversation, and despite her passive position as listener, Janie too finds herself engaging in the lively discussion – that is, until Jody demands her to return indoors to help a customer. Jody's controlling behavior does not stop, but continues to grow in frequency and intensity: he publicly accuses Janie of incompetence in the store and physically abuses her one evening over dinner. As their relationship worsens, Janie also loses sexual interest in Jody, such that their marriage exists without love or passion. Nonetheless, Janie does not mention any of her grievances to Jody and instead keeps her composure in front of him, though she has realized her desire for something new internally.

The townspeople's conversation about nature versus nurture calls attention to the novel's overarching exploration of the human desire for control over others and over nature. Janie seeks participation in order to find her own ideas through speaking, and its notable here that the narrator, which often interrupts the characters' speech, here lets them speak without interruption. Janie's decision to remain silent is ultimately a self-defense mechanism, as she realizes that expressing herself will result in physical abuse. That said, her discontent causes her to realize her own needs internally, which nonetheless marks progress from her previous states of being – with Logan and even in the earlier stages of marriage with Jody.

Later one day at the storefront, a poor woman called Mrs. Robbins – wife of a man named Tony Robbins – enters the store and requests a bit of meat from Jody for her starving family. Janie ends up getting the meat for Mrs. Robbins, who remarks that her husband neglects to feed both her and their children. Meanwhile, the men on the porch of the store laugh incredulously at Mrs. Robbins behavior, saying that they would never allow their wives to behave so absurdly in public. In response, Janie voices her disapproval of their bad attitude, and tells the group of men that despite what they think, they don't know anything about women.

The men on the porch are dismissive of Mrs. Robbins' needs in the same way that Jody is dismissive of Janie's needs – in all cases, these men desire power, and particularly power over women. Janie's defense of Mrs. Robbins and subsequent insult to the men (that they don't know anything about women) is an eruption of emotions Janie has experienced but has yet to express. It is another step in finding her voice. Though the men were not directly abusing her, Janie empathizes with Mrs. Robbins as a victim of male domination. The men on the porch (and Jody) care about pride. Mrs. Robbins can't afford to care about pride—she cares about her children.

CHAPTER 7

The years being married to Jody take "all the fight out of Janie's face," as she spends them ignoring her emotions and learning to submit herself to Jody's insatiable desire for control and power. She becomes remarkably stoic in response to his abuse, almost as if she is able to detach her body from her soul.

Janie's stoic attitude toward the abuse and stifling she receives from Jody indicates a sense of deliberateness and self-control. Even though Janie remains in a passive position in relation to Jody, she has gained self-awareness and continues to grow toward a more dramatic recognition of her own independence.

During this time, Jody has aged a great deal, such that Janie even describes there being "something dead about him." As Jody loses the ability to sit down and eventually to walk normally, he nevertheless retains his ability to be cruel to Janie, telling her that she is an "ole hen." In response to Jody's repeated insults about Janie's looks, Janie remains silent, as she is able to see instead the extent to which he feels terrible and insecure in himself.

The sudden deterioration of Jody's body is what brings about his sudden focus on Janie's old age. This pattern makes clear what had been implicitly clear all along: Jody's search for power emerges from his own insecurity, such that his desire for power grows more desperate as his insecurity grows more intense.

Jody grows increasingly rude and intolerable as his health worsens. Jody's insults reach an all-time high one day when Janie is helping a customer at the store: she makes a mistake preparing tobacco for a customer, and Jody does not simply berate her for her incompetence as a woman and as a salesperson, but also for her bad looks and old age. Instead of remaining silent as per usual, Janie tells Jody that all he has anymore is his "big voice," and that when undressed, he looks "lak de change uh life." Completely stunned by Janie's willingness to fight back, Jody hits Janie "with all his might" in front of everyone in the store.

The direct relationship between Jody's worsening health and the intensity of his insults further drives home the connection between Jody's desire for power and his insecurity. Janie's response to Jody's public humiliation of her does not indicate a sudden and new desire to stand up for herself, but rather the result of many years of remaining silent. In response to Janie's newly arrived ability to express herself and take a stand, Jody uses his physical strength as a last resort to exert control over Janie, now realizing that he lacks not only his health, but his ability to silence his wife.

CHAPTER 8

In an effort to reject Janie in a more formal way, Jody decides to relocate his belongings to a guest room, where he also sleeps in order to avoid Janie at night. Jody's desire to avoid Janie continues to grow stronger, as he ignores her in the store and refuses to eat the food she prepares for him. In conversation with Janie, Pheoby Watson reveals the fact that people throughout Eatonville believe Janie has been attempting to poison Jody. Janie is horrified by the mere idea of this, indicating her continued sense of allegiance to her husband, even in their relationship's highly compromised final stages.

Jody's decision to change rooms shows that he is now relying on new mechanisms to insult Janie; he can no longer rely on language to silence Janie, as she has begun to found a voice for herself, as shown through her sardonic series of insults to Jody at the end of Chapter 7. Janie's continued sense of allegiance to Jody speaks to the complexity of her emotions at this stage – as she feels simultaneous sadness about Jody's deterioration and accompanying deterioration of their marriage, though at the same time remains angry about the years of silence she endured under Jody's harsh control.

Janie calls for a doctor from nearby in Orlando to examine Jody, determined to get her husband proper care despite having complicated feelings about him. The doctor informs Janie that it will only be a matter of days until Jody dies. Mourning Jody's impending death, Janie attempts to rekindle closeness with her husband in order to improve his final days. Despite Janie's efforts, Jody defensively accuses her of never having appreciated his generosity. Feeling a sudden sense of impending freedom from Jody, Janie articulates her long-held feeling that he was a tyrannical man who did not allow her any kind of self-expression. In a moment of intense anger, Janie reveals to Jody that he has been and is on his death-bed, a statement that Jody initially perceives as an insult, but quickly accepts as truth.

Janie is able to find full self-expression now with firm knowledge of Jody's oncoming death. Having recognized her capacity for self-defense and expression, Janie uses language to push Jody fully toward his demise; despite her initial feelings of ambivalence regarding Jody's death, Janie ultimately recognizes his deterioration as a sign of her own freedom: Janie is able to express her belief that her husband is and has been a tyrant at the same moment that she informs him of his death. It is precisely through each and every episode of her relationship with Jody that Janie is able to come to this moment of deep self-expression.

Soon after their argument, Jody dies and Janie is left to her own devices. Feeling a complicated mix of nostalgia, sympathy, mourning, and anger regarding Jody and their marriage, Janie looks in the mirror and has a climactic moment of self-recognition. She removes the rag from her head, now that Jody is no longer alive to force her to wear it. However, presumably recalling the rumors of the townspeople, Janie realizes she must be filled with apparent grief in order not to appear as a traitor. As such, she puts the head-rag back on and announces out her window that Jody has died.

Janie's removal of the scarf from her head marks a symbolic removal of Jody's control from her life. In particular, she is now able to regain her sense of self as a beautiful and desirable woman, something that Jody deliberately tried to destroy, especially in the final days preceding his death. Yet, Janie's eventual decision to keep the scarf on in order to avoid judgment from the townspeople shows that she is still subject to the judgments of the townspeople. She is still not completely free to express herself.

CHAPTER 9

Janie attends Jody's funeral and pretends to be in mourning in order to convince the townspeople that her love for Jody was authentic. However, in reality, Janie feels free, having burned all of her head-rags and now wearing her hair in a braid below her waist. In her new state of being alone, which Janie really sees as a state of freedom and independence, Janie thinks more critically about her familial origins – and in particular, her relationship with Nanny.

Janie's continued concern for public perception of herself reveals, once again, her mechanism of self-censoring that will keep her newly recognized sense of independence from becoming out of hand. Janie's automatic connection between freedom as it relates to marriage (or lack thereof) and with Nanny points to the complexity of Janie's ideas about sex, love and marriage – they are a combination of her own ideas and those of her grandmother.

Janie expresses anger toward Nanny and the values and worldviews she taught Janie as a child. Specifically, Janie says that Nanny took the idea of the horizon and limited it "to such a little bit of a thing." In other words, Janie feels anger toward Nanny because of the way that she stifled Janie's sense of possibility and wonder in life for the purposes of imparting upon her granddaughter the importance of stability, "aid and assistance" from a man.

Not only does Nanny's past as a slave cause her to prioritize material security in marriage, but also limits her sense of possibility. For that reason, Nanny limited Janie's sense of "the horizon" – the realm of possibilities. Janie's retroactive recognition of her anger toward Nanny indicates Janie's growing sense of independence and self-expression, as she continues to free herself from various sources of domination in her life – namely, Nanny and Jody.

Despite Nanny's belief that "Uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing," Janie feels remarkably happy in her new state of freedom – the only exception to her happiness being the store. She begins to wear white after six months of mourning, though is nevertheless not ready to accept any man's attempt to be with her: she explicitly tells Pheoby that she is happy being independent, and even confesses that she doesn't care if the townspeople think she is not sad about Jody's death, as it would not be fair to herself to stifle her own happiness.

Janie's decision to wear white but continue to rebuff the advances of suitors shows Janie's growing sense of fulfillment in independence. Not only is Janie now able to feel happy on her own, but wants to share the fact of her individual happiness unapologetically with the rest of the world, without the former anxiety of what people might think.

CHAPTER 10

Hezekiah Potts leaves work early one day to go to a ball game and Janie reassures him that she can close the store by herself this once. Besides slow business, the day is otherwise ordinary – that is, until just before Janie decides to close up at six o'clock. At five thirty, a tall handsome man comes into the store and asks to buy a pack of cigarettes. The man and Janie playfully flirt for a few minutes until the man asks Janie to play a game of checkers. After the game, Janie and the man continue to flirt and decide to play another game of checkers. Janie playfully responds, "It's all right tuh come teach me, but don't come tuh cheat me."

The unnamed man – soon revealed to be Tea Cake – enters Janie's life when she is caught off-guard and engaged in her day-to-day life. It is Tea Cake's acceptance of Janie's true self that marks him as different than Logan and Jody. Tea Cake's invitation to Janie to play checkers in particular shows how he treats Janie as an equal. That said, checkers speaks not only to the playful aspect of Janie and Tea Cake's dynamic, but also to its role as a game – a realm in which there are rules that can not only be taught, but bent in order to cheat. This doubly playful and dangerous dynamic defines Janie's eventual relationship with Tea Cake.

After asking the man how he plans to get home, Janie realizes that she doesn't know his name. The man responds that his name is Vergible Woods, but that everyone calls him Tea Cake for short, which Janie attributes to his "sweetness." They continue flirting as customers arrive back from the game, and continue until everyone else has returned home for the night.

Janie and Tea Cake's conversation unfolds organically and playfully, indicating a shift in the way that Janie's attraction works: namely, she is intrigued by Tea Cake's "sweetness" and his ability to treat her as an equal player in conversation, not as someone with "horizon."

Tea Cake says goodnight to Janie and she finds herself thinking about her safety on her walk home – particularly, the question of whether or not Tea Cake is a strange man. However, Janie's intuition immediately shuts down her paranoia: she realizes that she feels as though she has known Tea Cake all her life, and feels especially moved by the ease with which they were able to converse with one another. After arriving home, Janie watches the rising moonlight "quenching the thirst of the day."

Janie's initial feelings of nervousness about Tea Cake are eventually validated by his often overly-playful behavior, even if well-intentioned. Nevertheless, Janie is overwhelmed by how comfortable she feels talking to Tea Cake, as with him she can express herself. Talking to Tea Cake quenches Janie's thirst for a voice and a sense of individuality the way the moon quenches the thirst of the day.

CHAPTER 11

Janie is tempted to ask Hezekiah what he knows about Tea Cake, but decides not to in order not to reveal her growing interest in him. Janie convinces herself, too, that Tea Cake is too young and poor for her, and must be the kind of man who would never marry. Tea Cake waits a week until he returns to the store. At first, Janie is reluctant to be friendly toward him, still feeling residual paranoia about the possibility of him stealing her money or engaging in other strange behavior. But Tea Cake quickly charms Janie after he begins to play make-believe guitar. After they exchange brief small talk, Tea Cake asks Janie to play checkers again, and coaches her on each move so that she can improve as a player. The townspeople aren't used to seeing Janie play checkers, but enjoy watching her do so.

Despite Janie's recently improved ability to recognize her feelings as they arise, she nonetheless remains preoccupied with what the townspeople might think of her attraction to Tea Cake. However, Janie is not worried enough to forget about Tea Cake or reject his attempts to charm her: instead, Janie now finds herself open to someone as playful as Tea Cake, someone who lets her explore her own capacity for imagination and possibility. Tea Cake's decision to "coach" Janie in checkers further emphasizes his desire not just to treat Janie as an equal, but to help her improve her mind. He's not trying to stifle her, he's not telling her what to do, he's trying to help her improve.

Having stayed at the store all day, Tea Cake walks Janie home, where they then eat pound cake and make fresh lemonade. After remarking that the moon is too pretty to be "sleepin' it away," Tea Cake suggests that he and Janie go fishing at midnight. They stay out all night at the lake, and in the morning, Janie has to hide Tea Cake as she leaves to go to work in order to avoid rumors throughout town. Despite the anxiety of the whole affair, Janie expresses pleasure in feeling like "a child breaking the rules."

Tea Cake's suggestion that he and Janie go fishing at midnight symbolizes his individuality and desire to go against the grain of social norms. It is precisely this attitude of Tea Cake that attracts Janie to him. Janie reveals further growth and emotional maturity in her willingness to prioritize her own happiness, though she still feels the need to act secretly in order to avoid the town's judgment. Like a "child breaking rules" she enjoys this trickery, but at some point she will have to act as an adult and make her intentions clear.

The next morning, Hezekiah warns Janie about spending time with a man like Tea Cake, who he believes is too "low" for a woman like Janie. Janie listens, but is nevertheless charmed once again when she arrives home that night – after climbing the steps of her porch, Tea Cake is already there waiting for her with a freshly caught trout in hand. After eating dinner, Janie falls asleep and awakes to Tea Cake combing her hair with his hand. Despite the feelings of pleasure that being with Tea Cake brings to her, Janie remains wary. As he combs her hair, Tea Cake expresses his fear that Janie is disgusted by him and that she wants him to leave. Janie consoles Tea Cake not by effusively revealing her feelings for him, but instead by reassuring him that they are friends. Tea Cake is disappointed by the way Janie labels their relationship, as he believes that they are lovers. Janie tells Tea Cake that he must be confused by the pleasures of eating fish and cornbread, and that he will feel differently the next day. Still disappointed, Tea Cake leaves and wishes Janie a good night.

Janie is clearly ambivalent about Tea Cake to a certain extent – she is affected by Hezekiah's warning about Tea Cake, but nonetheless charmed by his advances. Janie is overwhelmed by pleasure of all kinds in Tea Cake's presence, and thus is attempting to keep her rational intellect intact in order to avoid making rash decisions. This marks a new tendency for Janie, as with Jody, Janie instantly took her feelings of sexual appetite for love, without any self-questioning to balance out her immediate desire for pleasure.

Janie spends the following day thinking about Tea Cake. Despite her conscious desire to suppress her feelings for him, she refers to him as "a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in spring." Yet Janie still attempts to convince herself that she is not interested in Tea Cake, even as she wonders where he is or why he hasn't returned yet. The next day, Tea Cake comes to her house, proclaims his feelings for Janie to be real, and swiftly leaves Janie to process his words. That night, Tea Cake returns again, and he and Janie eat dinner and spend the night together. Even as Janie enjoys her time with Tea Cake, she remains worried about his potential irresponsibility and inconsistency, and spends the following three days worrying in Tea Cake's absence. After these three days, however, Tea Cake returns once again to Janie's home – this time in a battered car (which, Tea Cake reveals, he bought to drive Janie around) – and asks Janie to the town picnic so that they may officially publicize their relationship to the rest of the town.

Janie's comparison between Tea Cake and "a bee to...a pear tree blossom in spring," however, shows Janie's consistency – she harkens back to the memory of her sexual awakening with Johnny Taylor in order to articulate her feelings of sexual desire and excitement about Tea Cake. Her feelings for Tea Cake are as natural as the attraction of a bee to a pear blossom in spring, and therefore cannot be resisted by the rational terms she seeks to use in order to keep her feelings at bay. Tea Cake's persistence marks him as different, once again, from Janie's previous lovers: he is committed to establishing a foundation of trust in the realm of their communication and wants to make Janie feel secure as an equal participant in their relationship. He also wants to make hat relationship public, to cease to be the child breaking the rules.

CHAPTER 12

After Tea Cake and Janie make their first public appearance together at the town picnic, Janie becomes the object of the town's judgmental gossiping. Pheoby's husband Sam Watson speculates to his wife that Tea Cake must be using Janie for her money and that he is "draggin' de woman away from church," insinuating that Tea Cake is a criminal and a heretic. Furthermore, Sam encourages Pheoby to talk to Janie herself, telling his wife to warn Janie against becoming like Mrs. Tyler, a town widow who was swindled by her younger lover, Who Flung, following her husband's death. Pheoby listens to Sam's worries, but assures him that Janie is "her own woman" and will act as such.

The town gossip reveals the repercussions of Janie's decision to act according to her individual desires, and not the traditional norms of society. In this way, the fact that the town gossips and Janie still allows herself to be with Tea Cake, to prove to people like Pheoby Watson that she is "her own woman" marks tremendous growth for Janie in her process of finding self-expression and individual fulfillment by listening to her own desires.

Pheoby approaches Janie and warns her of her status as the object of the town's gossip, paying particular attention to Tea Cake's low social status and the fact that Janie ought to continue mourning the death of Jody, which she has clearly stopped doing by wearing colorful clothing around town. In her new state of self-possession and happiness, Janie tells Pheoby simply that Tea Cake loves how she looks in blue, and asks Pheoby once again, "Ah ain't grievin' so why do Ah hafta mourn?" Janie listens to Pheoby's warnings, but ultimately is resolute in declaring her love for Tea Cake, saying that she plans to sell the store, after which she and Tea Cake will leave Eatonville and establish themselves in a place where they will no longer be surrounded by the town's gossip.

Pheoby's warnings to Janie distill the general gossip of Eatonville about Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, and reveal a traditional worldview of how a widow ought to act following her husband's death. Rather than fulfill the traditional views of society, Janie is comfortable expressing her happiness for the first time in the novel thus far, regardless of the repercussions. Her decision to move away from Eatonville with Tea Cake is a strong one, and yet it is also a kind of running away from the town's judgment. Janie is willing to be exposed to that judgment, but not yet to face it.

Janie tells Pheoby that Tea Cake is not comparable to Jody Starks, and that she wants to escape the potential comparisons that might arise if she marries Tea Cake and stays in Eatonville. She concludes that her previous marriage to Jody marked a time when she lived her life according to Nanny's worldview, and that now she is ready to live her own way. When Pheoby asks her to expand upon this idea, Janie explains that Nanny's past as a slave made her prioritize wealth and status as ingredients for marriage over happiness and passion. Having married two wealthy men of high status and ending up unhappy, Janie is now ready to act according to her sense of authentically individual desire and passion – to sell the store, leave Eatonville, and marry Tea Cake. Taking Sam Watson's advice, Pheoby light-heartedly warns Janie against becoming like Mrs. Tyler, though she also expresses happiness about Janie's newfound state of joy.

Janie's reflections on Nanny reveal tremendous growth in Janie's maturity and level of self-awareness: early in the novel, Janie simply listens to Nanny's demands without knowledge of her own desires; in Chapter 9, Janie realizes her resentment toward Nanny about her traditional worldviews, but does not express any sympathy for why she might have come to feel these ways about marriage and material advancement. Here, Janie demonstrates a more empathetic understanding of why her grandmother came to be the way she was as a result of her traumatic experience as a slave. And she clearly expresses, also, her own vision for herself and the will to follow it.

CHAPTER 13

Janie leaves Eatonville and meets Tea Cake in Jacksonville, where he's been waiting for her. Free from their past in Eatonville, Janie and Tea Cake finally marry. Even though Janie feels "so glad she was scared of herself," she neglects to share everything with Tea Cake – she neglects to tell him about the stash of two hundred dollars she had brought with her, pinned inside of her shirt.

Janie's newfound happiness with Tea Cake is a product of her listening to her desires, though it is still an emotional state characterized by ambivalence: that is, her feeling that she is "so glad she was scared of herself" foreshadows the danger and instability of Janie's intense love for Tea Cake, a kind of love that is the polar opposite of Nanny's view of marriage as a source of safety and stability.

The next morning, Tea Cake leaves early in the morning, leaving Janie to ponder his whereabouts. Thinking still that Tea Cake simply went out to find fish to fry for breakfast, Janie is worried when he doesn't return for many hours. Janie spends the rest of the day and night anxiously thinking about Mrs. Tyler and her experience being cheated by the young and charming Who Flung. Janie determines that no matter what, she is too proud ever to return to Eatonville and be the object of public judgment and laughter.

Yet Janie's decision to hide money from her new husband, and the anxiety she feels as she thinks of Mrs. Tyler and waits for the disappeared Tea Cake to return, show that Janie also doubts where her desires may lead her. And Janie is still motivated by the perceptions of others. Earlier she feared them and was silent, now she is defiant of them, but in either case she is still reacting to those judgments. They are still dictating her actions.

After Janie takes a nap, still waiting anxiously, she hears Tea Cake outside playing guitar. He admits to Janie that he found the money in her shirt, and excitedly spent it on a celebratory dinner for himself and his fellow railroad laborers at his job. Without expressing disappointment about the money itself, Janie expresses simply that she felt left and excluded. Tea Cake rationalizes his poor judgment by telling Janie that he wished to hide his friends from her, as he worried they were too lowly for a woman of such high status. Still without expressing scorn about the stolen money, Janie simply expresses that she wants to be a part of all aspects of Tea Cake's life.

Tea Cake's decision to steal Janie's money is not malicious, but a testament to his completely untraditional approach to life – he prioritizes spontaneous play over anything serious, and seldom thinks ahead. For all of her anxiety, though, Janie is still in a new and improved state of mind: she is able to express herself to Tea Cake, a feeling unknown to her in her previous two marriages.

Tea Cake listens to Janie and promises to reimburse her for the money he stole. When Tea Cake leaves on Saturday night to go gamble, Janie finds herself worrying about Tea Cake's gambling habit, but manages to comfort herself, "It was part of him, so it was all right." A disheveled Tea Cake finally returns the following morning with a cut face and a wad of cash. Tea Cake's injury upsets Janie, though her fear is suddenly quelled when she and Tea Cake count his money (over three hundred dollars) together: she says he is "the Paymaster" and immediately tells him about the rest of her money in the bank. Tea Cake tells Janie that he will not need to touch any more of her money, as he will find work picking beans and tomatoes when they go to the muck – the Everglades. After their conversation, Janie feels "a self-crushing love," as "her soul crawled out from its hiding place."

Tea Cake listens to Janie and responds. It's a simple thing, but not anything Janie had ever known before. And Tea Cake also makes it clear that he's not interested in Janie's money, freeing her from that fear (planted by the judgment of others). And in response Janie feels "self-crushing love", a description of love that speaks to the paradoxical nature of her new state of happiness with Tea Cake: on the one hand she is now experiencing a state of sexual and relationship fulfillment that she had always yearned for and had never been a part of her previous marriages; on the other, she loves Tea Cake so much that she is also giving up some part of her individuality. Janie's love for Tea Cake both empowers her and gives him power over her.

CHAPTER 14

When Janie and Tea Cake arrive in the Everglades, Janie is overwhelmed by how lush and different the landscape is from anything she's ever seen before. Having been there before, Tea Cake takes charge and establishes them with the job of picking beans before the impending rush of laborers arrive in time for the official harvest season. Tea Cake teaches Janie to shoot a gun and hunt, teaching her until she becomes a more precise shot than Tea Cake himself.

The fertile and new landscape of the muck mirrors the new and sexually vibrant (or "fertile") quality of Janie and Tea Cake's relationship. Their experiences working and hunting together situate Janie in a different and much less traditional dynamic in relation to a man. She learns new, non-feminine skills, and exceeds, and Tea Cake shows no insecurity when her skill exceeds his own.

Janie fulfills the traditionally female household roles of food preparation and cleaning, but spends the days working alongside Tea Cake. Even though the labor is demanding, Janie finds it "mo' nicer than settin' round dese quarters all day," and compares the relative ease of their current lifestyle with the stress of managing the store in Eatonville.

Note how Janie doesn't mind doing manual labor when it is done out of love and shared commitment, in direct contrast to how she felt about similar work when being forced to do it by Logan, whom she did not love. Tea Cake has a kind of power over Janie just as Logan did; Tea Cake's power is one of love rather than force, which is a tremendous difference. But he still has power over her.

Janie and Tea Cake's home is crowded each night with neighbors, who visit either to listen to Tea Cake's music, have conversation, or gamble. Janie feels satisfied with their being the center of the town's attention and even more generally with their new laid-back lifestyle in the muck. In this state of satisfaction, Janie happily hypothesizes about what the people of Eatonville would think of her new outfit of dirty overalls and work shoes.

Tea Cake and Janie's life together is defined by shared experience. This equality ironically emerges from Tea Cake's forceful presence over Janie, and is what leads her to feel this sense of newfound fulfillment. And yet Janie still wonders what "normal" society would think about her. She's not upset or concerned about it, but she is still interested in it. It still matters to her.

CHAPTER 15

Janie experiences romantic jealousy for the first time in her marriage with Tea Cake: she finds "a little seed of fear…growing into a tree" as she witnesses a young, plump girl named Nunkie play with Tea Cake in the fields as they work. One day, as they are all working, fellow laborer Sop-de-Bottom asks Janie where Tea Cake is. In response, Tea Cake waves his hands from a low point on the ground, five rows away from them. When Janie approaches Tea Cake, she finds him on the ground, playfully wrestling with Nunkie.

Once again, Tea Cake's poor judgment in his mistreatment of Janie emerges not from an active desire to hurt her, but from prioritizing fun so much as to show a clear disregard for traditional social norms. Janie's need for monogamy with Tea Cake indicates that she expects equality in all facets of their relationship, and is willing to appear controlling in order to ensure that her husband is faithful.

After screaming, separating Tea Cake and Nunkie, and attempting to harm Nunkie physically, Janie and Tea Cake return home, where Janie expresses her fury to Tea Cake regarding his supposed infidelity. Instead of engaging Janie in a thoughtful discussion about her feelings and his actions, Tea Cake wrestles her to the ground and instead comforts her with the physical fulfillment of sex. Afterward, Janie makes Tea Cake tell her that he does not love Nunkie, which he says.

Tea Cake's decision to console Janie (successfully) through physical pleasure speaks to the fact that the foundation of their relationship in general is one built on mutual passion and sexual desire – and that Tea Cake uses his physicality to exert power over Janie. That said, Janie demands Tea Cake to promise verbally that he does not love Nunkie, indicating her further attachment to language and expression as a means to find truth. Each of them is controller the other, in their own different ways.

CHAPTER 16

Satisfied with their lifestyle at the end of the harvest season, Janie and Tea Cake decide to remain in the muck and wait until next year. At this time, Janie becomes friends with her neighbor Mrs. Turner, a black woman with a notably awkward posture and gait. During one of her visits at Janie's home, Mrs. Turner encourages Janie to meet her brother, emphasizing his intellect and straight hair. After referring to her brother as "uh white folks nigger," Mrs. Turner tells Janie that she wishes Janie and her brother could be a couple, simply because Mrs. Turner appreciates their lighter skin and yearns to "lighten up the race."

Mrs. Turner's racism against black people is hypocritical, as she herself is black, and speaks to the general absurdity of racism as a system of values. Furthermore, Mrs. Turner's suggestion that Janie and her brother meet, simply because of their shared trait of light skin, is completely superficial, indicating the general superficiality and lack of substance that belies racist attitudes: it is a system of ideas built upon nothing other than the desire to put others down in order to empower oneself.

When Janie returns inside to Tea Cake, she realizes that Tea Cake has heard her entire conversation with Mrs. Turner. Tea Cake expresses his hatred for Mrs. Turner, angered by her presumptuous invitation that Janie meet her brother. Tea Cake plans to reprimand Mr. Turner for his wife's rude behavior, but feels instinctively bad for Mr. Turner upon seeing him on the street: Mr. Turner appears to be a sad, exhausted man with a "lungless laugh," powerless against his wife's domineering nature.

Tea Cake's ability to express his hatred for Mrs. Turner to Janie shows the extent of honesty in their relationship. Mr. Turner's pathetic demeanor and powerlessness indirectly calls attention to Mrs. Turner's need for pathological self-empowerment through putting others down in other areas of her life, and that it is not simply an issue of race.

After telling Janie that talking to Mr. Turner won't change Mrs. Turner's behavior toward her, Tea Cake instructs Janie simply to act coldly toward Mrs. Turner so that she realizes she is unwelcome in their home. However, Mrs. Turner is seduced by Janie's light skin, straight hair, and higher class manners – all things that she worships as "Janie's Caucasian characteristics." Janie describes Mrs. Turner as a "believer," who "had built an altar to the unattainable – Caucasian characteristics for all." Even though Mrs. Turner clearly objects to Tea Cake and Janie's marriage, they learn to tune her out. As the summer ends, the harvest season begins and Janie and Tea Cake prepare to be busier once again, no longer as vulnerable to the annoying disturbances of Mrs. Turner.

Mrs. Turner's particular self-created hierarchy shows that racism in general is not something that can stand alone and be accepted as inherently true at face value. Instead, it is a set of ideas that is created by humans to make one side feel higher and the other lower, but has no connection to truth or reality. Mrs. Turner's obsession with whiteness is not unlike Jody's obsession with power, as both characters seek a way of finding power and seniority in societal organization.

CHAPTER 17

As the harvest season picks up, the muck becomes repopulated with both new and old faces, including Mrs. Turner's infamous brother. Instantly jealous, Tea Cake preemptively whips Janie in order to make sure she doesn't cheat on him. Upon observing Janie's bruises, Sop-de-Bottom and other men around the muck express jealousy to Tea Cake, as they too desire control over a woman like Janie. In response to Tea Cake's abuse, Janie remains silent and continues to express her love for Tea Cake.

Tea Cake's beating of Janie—which come as an extreme surprise to the reader—is a symptom of his *insecurity, which is not about political power as it was for Jody but rather around sexual power. Either way, though, it drives him to affirm his power over Janie through a preemptive physical attack. Janie's silent acceptance of Tea Cake's abuse is not of the same kind as her silence in response to Janie, as she has now found her voice and been treated as an equal by Tea Cake. Rather, her choice not to put up a fight is just that—* a choice*—born out of her love for Tea Cake. That said, this dynamic indicates another complicating factor in the paradoxical nature of Janie's relationship with Tea Cake – while he liberates Janie, her particular love for him compromises her sense of independence.*

After cashing in their paychecks on Saturday afternoon, men and women of the muck (including Tea Cake, Dick Sterrett, Coodemay, Stew Beef, Sop-de-Bottom, Bootyny and Motor Boat) gather at Mrs. Turner's restaurant to celebrate. Chaos breaks out when the drunk Dick Sterrett and Coodemay begin antagonizing their fellow restaurant diners, which includes Tea Cake. Tea Cake wants to prove his nobility to Mrs. Turner and tries to escort the two drunk men out of the restaurant. But Tea Cake's attempt to help just adds to the chaos and soon a full-fledged fight breaks out. Mrs. Turner finally enters the havoc and screams for the police, berates her husband for not intervening more aggressively, and accuses Tea Cake of shoving her down.

Tea Cake has never seemed to care what people think of him, but Mrs. Turner and her brother makes him feel insecure, and so he acts to try to look good in their eyes, to prove himself noble. But in doing so he just creates more chaos, and somehow ends up looking even worse as far as Mrs. Turner is concerned. The implication is that acting just to please others who are judgmental of you will never work, as they will just find new reasons to perpetuate their original judgment.

CHAPTER 18

One afternoon, Janie watches a large group of Seminole Indians steadily walk past her house and asks them where they're going. The Indians reply that they're going to higher ground, explaining that a hurricane is coming. Fear about the potential hurricane buzzes through the muck as more Indians continue pass by, and many of the other residents of the muck also begin to flee, along with a variety of animals – rabbits, possums and snakes – all feeling the winds of the impending hurricane.

The collective migration of the Seminole Indians and particularly the migration of the animals gives a clear message: nature itself (in the case of the animals and the Indians, who are "closer to nature" than the other people) is telling her and Tea Cake to get out and seek higher ground.

One of the local Bahaman boys invites Tea Cake and Janie a ride to get to higher ground, but Tea Cake refuses the offer and assures him that they'll be fine if they stay put. Instead, Tea Cake invites some friends over, all of whom decide to remain in the muck despite the oncoming hurricane, and they begin to celebrate – eating, singing and dancing as other town dwellers continue to flee.

Tea Cake's refusal to leave the muck in the face of the storm (despite the warnings from nature) highlights his excessive pride in his own physical strength as well as his emphasis on a fun-loving approach to life. Janie simply accepts this decision—she has no voice in it at all, and does not attempt to have one. She just trusts Tea Cake.

Yet finally the winds kick in, awakening "the monster" in Lake Okechobee. All except one man – Motor Boat – leave Tea Cake and Janie's home to seek shelter in their own homes. The arrival of the hurricane is intensely violent, marked by "screaming wind…crashing…things hurtling and dashing with unbelievable velocity." Janie, Tea Cake and Motor Boat stand outside and take in the storm, "their eyes…watching" and "questioning God."

The scene in which Tea Cake, Janie and Motor Boat watch the violent storm embodies this chapter's overall exploration of human survival and man versus nature and God. The hurricane episode reveals the fact that all other obstacles in Janie's life – Nanny's traditional views, Logan's mistreatment, Jody's desire for control, Tea Cake's overpowering physical appeal, Mrs. Turner's racism – bear no weight against the strength of nature.

As the wind slaps against them and the waters rise, Tea Cake tells Janie that he assumes she is thinking about her big house back in Eatonville and wondering why Tea Cake ever "dragged" here to the muck. Janie responds that she doesn't feel that way at all and is happy as long as they stay together. Eventually, Tea Cake, Janie and Motor Boat decide to flee to find higher ground, as the waters continue to rise and they watch "people trying to run in raging waters and screaming when they find they couldn't."

Just as Tea Cake feels threatened by the physical (sexual) threat he perceived from Mrs. Turner's brother, in the face of the storm which he now realizes is more powerful than him, he is once again insecure and thinks that Janie probably wishes she had never come with him. Janie's response is telling, too. In saying that she is happy as long as she is with Tea Cake she is both expressing the depth of her love for him (and attaining such love was always a goal for her) but also indicating just how much of her own independence she has given up to that love. Her only desire is just to be with him. She has fulfillment, but not really independence.

Janie struggles to swim in the "fighting water" as Tea Cake, too, begins to lose his strength. Tea Cake sees a cow swimming with a dog atop its back and tells her to grab onto the cow's tail for help. Yet when Janie grabs the cow's tail, the dog attempts to attack her. Immediately upon seeing Janie in danger, Tea Cake launches toward the animal, and fights the dog to its death. Unfortunately, just before its death, the dog bites Tea Cake in the cheek, leaving him one last mark of natural world destruction before he and Janie can seek shelter. The following morning, "years later by their bodies," Janie and Tea Cake reach the dilapidated remains of Palm Beach, "no place to live at all," but a place where they can recover in the meantime. Janie attributes her survival to Tea Cake, and they proceed to discuss their frightening near-death incident with the dog.

Although Tea Cake indirectly provides Janie with feelings of self-recognition and confidence in her ability to express herself over the course of their relationship at large, Tea Cake's rescue of Janie in this scene reveals the extent to which their relationship relies on physical manifestations of affection. Here, unlike in Chapter 15, Tea Cake does not comfort Janie with sex, but the episode's "resolution" is still grounded in physical terms – Tea Cake fights the dog in order to save Janie's life. Still, there is an impediment to Tea Cake's physical empowerment in this scene – being bitten by the dog – a moment which quite overtly foreshadows Tea Cake's physical downfall.

CHAPTER 19

Surrounded by dead bodies and destroyed homes in Palm Beach, Janie and Tea Cake discuss where to go and what to do next. Meanwhile, two white men carrying rifles approach Tea Cake and forcefully enlist him to help with the mass burials of the surrounding dead corpses. Both black and white men are forced to help out with the work, though the black and white corpses are treated differently: white corpses are buried in coffins, while black corpses are hurled like trash into a hole. Tea Cake finds the work physically and emotionally intolerable, as he fears that Janie waits for him with anxiety each day, and cannot bear to think about the obvious racism throughout Palm Beach. Tea Cake and Janie resolve to leave Palm Beach and return to the muck.

In this scene, Hurston presents another instance of racism: the white male officials are exerting their power over Tea Cake as a black man and are depriving the black corpses of respect by burying them without coffins. The novel has taken place entirely in all-black towns with few whites around, and this glimpse of the racism in the broader culture shows how it is at once awful and ridiculous. The lack of white people and racism in the novel has allowed the black characters to appear as full people, not reduce by stereotypes or reacting to racism, and in the face of that fullness the premise on which racism rests, that skin color somehow confers more humanness on one set of people than another, is revealed as obviously false.

When Tea Cake and Janie return, they are happily surprised to find out that Motor Boat survived the hurricane. Things appear to return back to somewhat-normal, as Tea Cake returns to work -- rebuilding the dike – and Janie and Tea Cake go hunting. However, after a month of being back in the muck, Tea Cake comes home one afternoon feeling sick, with an aching head and empty stomach. Janie prepares him dinner, but when she serves it to him, Tea Cake refuses to eat. He thanks Janie nonetheless for the food and falls asleep. Later in the night, though, Tea Cake awakes feverishly to a coughing fit, explaining, "Somethin'..tried tuh choke me tuh death." The next morning, Tea Cake is not even able to drink water despite his thirst, nearly vomiting when bringing the cup to his lips. Worried, Janie calls for Dr. Simmons, the local white doctor who is well-respected in the muck. After Tea Cake explains his story, Dr. Simmons pulls Janie aside and informs her that the dog that bit Tea Cake must have been rabid, as Tea Cake's symptoms align with those of rabies. The doctor tries to comfort Janie, telling her that he will order medicine from Palm Beach, though it may be too late to save Tea Cake's life.

Tea Cake's case of rabies is an extension of the force of nature that victimized him and Janie (and other humans) during the hurricane. After contracting the disease, Tea Cake loses his physical strength, and, by extension, his sense of command over himself, Janie, and the rest of the world. Tea Cake thought himself more powerful than nature, and he was wrong. Meanwhile, Janie is now in a position of power in relation to Tea Cake in her new role as his caretaker.

In the coming days, Janie watches Tea Cake lose his sanity, appearing as though "a great fear had took hold of him." He continues to gag when he tries to drink water, and is overwhelmed by paranoia, accusing Janie of cheating on him with Mrs. Turner's brother when she goes to check whether or not his medicine has arrived. Janie comforts Tea Cake as he cries in her arms like a child. Their dialogue becomes re-infused with affection and Janie, too, feels comforted – until she finds a pistol beneath Tea Cake's pillow.

Just as Jody descended into fear and vicious lashing out as his body deteriorated, so too does Tea Cake. But Jody's attacks were verbal, they were expressions of political power. Tea Cake's fears are physical (Janie cheating on him) and so is his potential response—a gun. But note also how he lets Janie care for him in a way that Jody wouldn't. Their love is still there, it's just been warped by the rabies.

Before going to talk to the doctor again the following morning, Janie cautiously checks Tea Cake's pistol while he is outside using the outhouse, and finds that it is loaded with three bullets. She sets the gun so that it will cycle through three empty chambers before firing any bullets, giving her time to respond if the worst should happen. Tea Cake returns from the outhouse with a mad look in his eye, and before Janie knows it he's holding the pistol. He pulls the trigger, firing a blank. Janie pulls a rifle off the wall to try to scare him out of his crazy paranoia, but he fires twice more, and Janie is forced to shoot, killing him, before he shoots her. In Janie's words, "Tea Cake was gone."

Janie said earlier that she would be happy as long as she was with Tea Cake. She had essentially sacrificed herself to their love, which made her happy but did not make her independent. This moment of showdown with Tea Cake is significant not just because of its action, but because of the choice it forces on her—does she choose herself or Tea Cake? And despite her love for Tea Cake, and, in fact, because of her love for Tea Cake (who has been so warped by the rabies) she chooses herself.

Later that same day, Janie is put on trial for Tea Cake's death. In the courtroom, the black people who've come to watch have obviously turned against her, and are even willing to testify against her. Dr. Simmons delivers a testimony, telling the court that Tea Cake was genuinely dangerous and that he even wanted to have Tea Cake locked up in prison in order to ensure Janie was safe, but knew that she cared too much for Tea Cake to let that happen. When Janie is called to the stand, the novel's third-person narration disappears, and Janie explains to the jury in her own voice the story of the life and love she shared with Tea Cake. The all-white, all-male jury finds her innocent. After the trial, the white women of the muck gather around Janie to comfort her, while her former friends stand in judgment against her. Janie buries Tea Cake in Palm Beach on a white silk couch surrounded by roses "like a Pharaoh in his tomb."

In the aftereffects of choosing to live, of making the choice to choose herself over a damaged Tea Cake despite her love for him, Janie fully finds her voice in giving her testimony at the trial. And she does so in front of the judgment of whites and blacks. By emphasizing her love for Tea Cake, Janie indicates her arrival at a place where her love can coexist with a sense of independence and self-expression, a balance she did not have at any earlier point in the novel. The white jury's acceptance of Janie – especially when contrasted with the judgment of the black onlookers – is another instance in the novel of irony with regard to racism: Janie is rejected by those who nurtured her, and is supported by unfamiliar, white faces. And Janie continues to honor Tea Cake, even in death.

CHAPTER 20

The black men living around the muck realize after the "royal" burial Janie gives Tea Cake that they were wrong to abuse her as they did. As such, they turn their aggression to Mrs. Turner's brother and run him out of town. The men beg Janie to stay in the muck with them, but she is unable to stay there without Tea Cake. She returns to Eatonville with a package of garden seeds that remind her of Tea Cake and plans to plant them in memoriam.

The behavior of the men in the muck provide another example of characters in the novel using blame as a means to gain power: immediately after realizing they were wrong to blame Janie for Tea Cake's death, they turn to Mrs. Turner's brother, who also never did anything against Tea Cake. It's as if they always need someone to blame.

At this point, Janie concludes her story to Pheoby, telling her that she is satisfied to be home, as she has "been tuh the horizon and back." Janie expresses awareness of the judgments she will face now, but that she is strong enough to endure it all without much pain, as she has experienced love and feels fulfilled in her life.

At this point, Janie's roles as narrator and protagonist of her story collide, and the narrative comes full circle. At this moment, Janie not only tells Pheoby that she has reached "the horizon" but shows it, too: she is no longer a passive pawn in someone else's life, but the narrator of her own story, someone with a voice, power over her own life, who is able to face judgment with indifference, and who has independence and spiritual fulfillment.

Before falling asleep that night, Janie returns to the memory of killing Tea Cake. She realizes that Tea Cake is still alive as long as she is still alive, as he is still with her, having shown her the true meaning of the horizon.

Despite the inherent sadness of Janie's memory, this final moment of the novel reveals the impressive extent of Janie's strength and sense of self-recognition: she has found a balance in her life between love, even in Tea Cake's absence, and self-realization.

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